

Energy Trust of Oregon

By Ava Willis

Energy Trust of Oregon was established in 2002 as a nonprofit organization that invests in energy efficiency and renewable energy in order to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The 1.8 million customers (2022) of Portland General Electric, Pacific Power, Northwest Natural, Cascade Natural Gas, and Avista fund Energy Trust through a public purchase charge.

In 1999, the Oregon legislature passed Senate Bill (SB) 1149, which required the state's two largest gas and electric utility companies, Portland General Electric and Pacific Power, to collect a 3 percent public purchase charge from their customers (Northwest Natural, Cascade Natural Gas, and Avista became participants later). SB 1149 permitted the Oregon Public Utilities Commission (OPUC), which regulates Oregon utility companies, to use the public purchase charge to fund a nongovernmental organization dedicated to providing energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. The founders of the nonprofit specifically created Energy Trust to provide those programs. As such, while Energy Trust has its own independent board of directors and advisory councils, it ultimately reports to the OPUC.

Energy Trust invests specifically in small-scale energy efficiency and renewable energy projects. For instance, it provides financial incentives and development assistance to customers installing solar, hydropower, and other renewable energy systems in their homes or businesses, and it offers customers financing options and contractors to help improve the energy efficiency of their properties, including upgrading appliances, windows, insulation, and heating.

The organization emphasizes providing programs and services to historically underserved communities. According to its 2020 annual report, the nonprofit has saved 956 average megawatts of electricity since 2002 and 79 billion Btu of natural gas through its energy efficiency and renewable energy programs. This translates to \$8.9 billion saved in customer energy bills and the reduction of carbon emissions by 36.2 million tons.

Since its inception in 2002, Energy Trust has partnered with the Northwest Energy Efficiency Alliance, an interstate alliance of 140 utility companies and energy efficiency organizations that aims to create a larger market for energy efficient and renewable energy technologies. Energy Trust provides funding to NEEA and serves on its board of directors.

As of 2022, Energy Trust's annual budget expenditure is \$219.5 million dollars. The organization has about 120 employees, overseen by a volunteer board of directors and three advisory councils specializing in conservation, diversity, and renewable energy.

Sources

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<https://www.oregonencyclopedia.org/articles/energy-trust-of-oregon/>