History of the Oregon Public Utility Commission

About Our Past

Utility regulation in Oregon has its roots in statutes adopted by the Provincial Government to the Oregon Territory prior to statehood.

July 5, 1843—the first act regulating a "public utility" enacted by the then "Provincial Government," six years before the Territorial Government was established. This included regulating mills and millers.

Boston Mill, Albany, Oregon—1892

First built in 1853, then rebuilt in 1862 after a fire. It is the oldest continually operating water powered grist mill in Oregon.

October 19, 1876—the first instance in Oregon history of the regulation of a utility by a commission at the recommendation of Governor L.F. Grover and enacted by the Legislature. It was designed to effectively regulate the activities of the Locks Company.

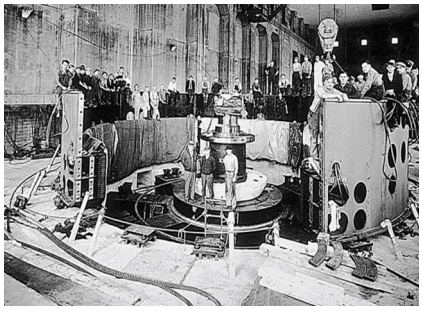
October 10, 1898—the Board of Railroad Commissioners was abolished, leaving the responsibility of accepting annual reports from regulated entities to be completed by the Secretary of State's Office.

February 19, 1907—The Railroad Commission was created with an elected three member board.

November 29, 1912—The Railroad Commission's jurisdiction was extended to include utilities and transportation regulation with the addition of the "Public Utility Act of 1911." This act was the first place in Oregon history to mention the regulation of telephone service.

July 1, 1915—February 28, 1931—the Railroad Commission was renamed the Public Service Commission of Oregon.

March 1, 1931—The Commission dropped from three members to one and the name was changed to the Public Utilities Commissioner, which was appointed by the governor.



Bonneville Dam Turbine being assembled, which was completed in 1937.

1986—Oregon voters approved a ballot measure changing the office back to a three-person, Governor-appointed Commission and changing the name to the Public Utility Commission of Oregon.

1995 —Congress deregulated much of the transportation industry. The regulation of motor transportation and rail safety was transferred to the Oregon Department of Transportation.

1999 —House Bill 3615 gave the Governor the authority to appoint the Commission Chair.

Telephone operators demonstrating the switchboard of early years.