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Barbara Craig, 2024 Pamela E. Klatt Award Winner, and Her Journey from Forestry to Hydropower

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Barbara Craig, Environmental Attorney for Stoel Rives, was the recipient of the 2023 Pamela E. Klatt award – a recognition presented by the Northwest Hydroelectric Association to honor individuals for their leadership and service contributions to the Northwest hydroelectric industry.

When POWERHOUSE spoke with Craig, she viewed receiving the Pam Klatt Award as a moment of both celebration and humility. During the interview, she said, “I’m the ultimate staffer. I like to be of service to people, and so the attention was really humbling.”

Read on to learn more about Craig's journey through the hydropower industry.



A LEGACY OF SERVICE

Craig's path in hydropower began non-traditionally, with an undergraduate degree in forestry. Initially, she worked as a tree planter before later joining the Forest Service as a Project Forester. Her experiences in the field, especially her involvement in wildland firefighting, as well as early introduction to working with National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) documents, set the stage for her future endeavors.

Craig's background in forestry provided a unique perspective that she has applied throughout her hydropower career. During the interview, Craig drew parallels between the two fields, noting the importance of adaptive management, science-based decision-making, and stakeholder engagement. "Hydropower relicensing is really a lot like writing an environmental assessment for a forestry project," she explained, as both require a deep understanding of the landscape, regulatory frameworks, and the ability to navigate complex stakeholder dynamics.



A turning point in her early career came when Craig decided to pursue a law degree, motivated by a desire to better understand, and navigate, environmental regulations. “I never wanted to be a lawyer,” Craig confessed, “but I worked with someone in the Forest Service who had his law degree, and he’d done what I planned on doing... He said, ‘You can always come back to the Forest Service, but stay general,’ so I took his advice to heart.”

This decision led Craig to work for the federal courts and eventually for Stoel Rives LLP in Portland, Oregon, where she specialized in forestry and hydropower issues. Her work during the spotted owl debate, and subsequent involvement in salmon petitions under the Endangered Species Act, defined her entry into the sector. “That was my pivot point,” she recalled, “because I started working on what a capacity contract with Bonneville Power Administration meant and what it did to the federal hydropower system.”

One of the defining aspects of Craig’s career has been the collaborative nature of the hydropower industry. She emphasized the interdisciplinary and cooperative spirit that permeates the field. “You work together on such important issues over such a long period of time, and you just build great relationships,” she said.

SHARING A PASSION FOR WATERPOWER

As an ardent advocate for workforce development, Craig highlighted the importance of mentorship and career guidance. In her role as a co-chair of Women in Hydro for the Northwest Hydroelectric Association (NWHHA), Craig enjoys creating opportunities for new professionals to connect and learn. “Making people feel comfortable in the hydro industry is important to me,” she noted, emphasizing the inclusive and supportive nature of the industry.



Craig also shared a personal anecdote about her son, who recently gained a deeper appreciation for hydropower through his studies in engineering. “He started to actually explain capacity in even more refined words than I needed to know,” she said, illustrating the importance of early exposure and education in fostering interest in the field.

As a staunch advocate for hydropower, Craig stressed the need for continued education and public awareness. She praised the National Hydropower Association’s efforts in promoting the benefits of hydropower, including reliability, grid stability, and low-cost energy. “We need to continue to talk about these things and make people understand that hydro’s baseload is critical to keeping the lights on,” she asserted.

FINAL THOUGHTS

As she reflected on her career, Craig expressed deep gratitude for the opportunities and experiences that have shaped her journey. “I love this industry. I love the people in it. I love serving in it,” she said.

Craig’s legacy in the industry is marked by humility, collaboration, and a relentless pursuit of excellence. The Pam Klatt Award is a fitting recognition of a career dedicated to hydropower.

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