

PLANTS

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structure, according to Geer, ended up being an “eroding” hill of dirt “full of weeds.” Part of the complaint, she said, was that mud from the hill would run down onto the walkway below.

“I decided it would be interesting to try to stop that hillside from eroding and getting some natives growing,” Geer said.

After a couple failed attempts to establish plants, Geer said the group was able to use erosion fabric to help stabilize the hillside and get some native bunch grasses growing.

A short split-rail fence was also installed along the west end of the

park to encourage visitors to stay on the walkway. Once that was in place, Geer said, the group was inspired to keep moving through the park.

“As soon as we put that fencing up and planted some things, it just took off,” she said.

Through various methods, including the help of a prescribed burn done by the Oregon Department of Forestry in 2017, they eventually were able to remove a range of non-native and noxious plants — quackgrass, bindweed, bachelor button, hairy vetch, chicory and sulphur cinquefoil, to name a few — and establish a variety of native plants.

Roughly 20 types of native plants — including penstemons,

goldenrod, native cinquefoil, rabbit brush, coyote mint, horsemint, little sunflower and milkweed — have been put in throughout the park.

“A lot of the park is open and sunny, (and) these plants like open and sunny areas,” Geer said of how the group chose what to plant. “It’s just an ongoing thing. The plants will continue to grow, and hopefully we’ll manage them in a way to promote the native plants.”

Geer said the move is fulfilling a vision that started a little more than 20 years ago of promoting native plants in the park.

However, Geer said she is hoping some of the plants that have been put in — including the two varieties of milkweed — will have an

additional impact.

“I know a lot of people know about (milkweed), but I’m not sure people realize we can get monarch butterflies here (because of it),” she said.

Geer said the third generation of monarchs migrating up from California during the year would arrive in the region in about August and lay eggs. That next generation would make the trip back south for the winter.

“We want to provide the food for the monarchs, and (milkweed also) has great nectar for other insects,” she said.

The park is also having an impact on local children.

Ruthi Davenport, who founded Oak Haven Preschool in 2011, said

she brings her students into nature once a week, and has brought them up to Gangloff Park.

“Nature connection is a really important part of our philosophy,” she said. “A few days a year we’ll come up and talk about the plants up here. Last spring we planted seed balls with Susan. The kids made the mud balls with the nutrients and seeds and threw them out to grow. Gangloff Park is kind of our adopted ecology project in the community.”

Davenport believes it’s important to teach children where they belong in the circle of life, and said trips like the ones her students take to Gangloff help with that concept.

“Those children will grow up to be the stewards of the earth,” she said.

HEARING

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horrible impact on our grandkids and their grandkids.”

JoAnn Marlett, of Baker City, said that the permanent and potentially negative impact B2H would have on this region must not be ignored.

“You (the people responsible for B2H) will be gone tomorrow, but we will be living with the effects for years,” Marlett said.

Adrienne Henderson, of La Grande, said the power line will not make Northeast Oregon a better place.

“It will give us no benefits, just problems,” she said.

The power line, according to information previously released by Idaho Power, will give it the capacity to carry increasingly high levels of electricity.

Several people who spoke at the hearing questioned whether Idaho Power will actually need this added capacity.

Sandy Ryman, of La Grande, said the B2H power line is not needed because the growth rate in the use of electricity in the United States is the lowest it has been in many decades. A number of others who spoke echoed her questions, noting that the use of electricity is not increasing despite population growth because people are becoming more efficient in how they use energy.

Bill DeLashmutt, of La Grande, the lone community member to speak in favor of B2H, also addressed efficiency. He contended that the proposed transmission line would allow Idaho Power to operate more effectively, helping it to keep its costs to consumers low. DeLashmutt said the price of electricity provided by Idaho Power is 25% below the national average.

DeLashmutt said that stopping B2H would be like asking you to drive with your emergency brake on, which wastes energy.

“Let’s allow Idaho Power to drive with its brakes off,” DeLashmutt said.

Throughout the hearing, concern was often expressed about B2H power lines igniting a fire. The possibility of this was shown last fall with the devastating Camp Fire, which destroyed the city of Paradise in Northern California. The fire was apparently started by power lines blown down by strong winds.

John Winters, of La Grande, noted that the La Grande area and Paradise



Dick Mason/The Observer

About 200 people attended a hearing at the Blue Mountain Conference Center about the controversial proposed Boardman to Hemingway transmission line project. The hearing was conducted by the Oregon Department of Energy’s Energy Facility Siting Council.

share a number of fire risk factors and that Paradise receives about three times as much precipitation as Union County does.

“It makes no sense to invite an additional risk when we have plenty as it is,” Winters said.

Michael Rosenbaum, of La Grande, a member of a wildfire prevention committee, said the power line would put the community at risk because it is flanked by timber and grasslands and periodically receives strong summer winds. Rosenbaum said it would be important for Idaho Power to be willing to turn off its power in the event of a fire or high winds.

Rosenbaum was one of several people who recalled seeing the Rooster Peak Fire in August of 1973, which began between Perry and La Grande and came close to Grande Ronde Hospital before roaring south below Morgan Lake and threatening to enter La Grande.

“The fire endangered the entire town of La Grande,” said Lois Barry, of La Grande.

John Anderson, of La Grande, also has not forgotten the blaze.

“Rooster Peak can happen again. (B2H) is an unacceptable risk. Please consider the safety of La Grande,” Anderson told the Energy Facility Siting Council.

Joe Horst, who lives southwest of La Grande, said his home sits where the Rooster Peak fire roared through 46 years ago.

“It is a potential hazard, big time,” Horst said.

Gail Carbiener, of Bend, said he is worried about the potential of fires starting

during the B2H construction process. Carbiener said he would like to see B2H crews have someone on duty watching for fires while work is being done and during off hours.

Carbiener, a member of the Oregon-California Trails Association, noted that the proposed B2H routes would pass over or near the Oregon Trail. Idaho Power has said in its proposal it will try to avoid damaging the Oregon Trail. Carbiener argued that the trail can only be protected if someone with firsthand knowledge of it is on site during construction.

“The trail is misrepresented on maps. We would need an expert on it,” he said.

Another B2H issue that came up concerns the routes Idaho Power is considering through La Grande. One, named the Mill Creek route, would be highly visible from La Grande, while a second, the Morgan Lake route, would be much less visible. Both are part of the Proposed Draft Order.

A number of people said the Mill Creek route would cause significant damage to the viewsheds in the Morgan Lake area.

“It would be the most impactful to La Grande,” said La Grande Mayor Steve Clements, regarding the effects of the Mill Creek route on the viewshed.

The mayor and the La Grande City Council passed a proclamation in April opposing having B2H come through the La Grande area.

Kerry Tweit, who lives in the Morgan Lake area, said one of the best things he likes about his home is the view it affords of the sunset.

He said the proposed B2H plans call for a tower to be placed exactly at the point where he enjoys viewing sunsets each evening.

The proposed Mill Creek and Morgan Lake routes both call for towers that could be seen in the Morgan Lake area. This disturbs Susan Badger Jones, of La Grande, who said she has been enjoying taking walks at Morgan Lake for 30 years. She now fears that much of the beauty of the area would be lost because of the towers.

“While people will still be able to walk there, the quality of the experience will be greatly compromised,” she said.

Idaho Power announced last week that it would give the City of La Grande \$100,000 to make improvements at Morgan Lake to help mitigate any problems B2H power lines would cause in the area. Ashley O’Toole, of La Grande, said this money would not make up for the damage B2H would cause.

“It would not make the towers go away,” he said.

Michael McAllister, of La Grande, said he would prefer the route recommended by the Bureau of Land Management because it would be less visible and cause less environmental damage. Also known as the Glass Hill Alternate Route, this route would come out of Ladd Canyon and run south of where the proposed Mill Creek and Morgan Lake routes are.

McAllister said power lines on the BLM’s preferred route would be less vulnerable to lightning strikes because they would follow a lower route. The Mill Creek and Morgan Lake routes

by comparison follow more ridgelines. The BLM preferred route is not included in the Draft Proposed Order.

The application the Energy Facility Siting Council is now considering was submitted to it by the Oregon Department of Energy. The application was criticized at the meeting by Lois Barry, who questioned its accuracy. She noted that when discussing the Morgan Lake area, the application states there is only one lake, failing to mention Twin Lake, a 27-acre body of just west of Morgan Lake.

According to Barry, the application also states that vegetation will obscure B2H towers, which she said is unlikely considering the projected height of the towers.

“That is wishful thinking,” she said.

Thursday’s hearing was the third of five being

conducted by ODOE’s Energy Facility Siting Council regarding B2H. The final two will be held June 26 at the Pendleton Convention Center and June 27 in Boardman in the Port of Morrow Riverfront Room. Each hearing will run from 4:30 p.m. to 8 p.m.

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