

LAWSUIT

Continued from Page 5A

co-chairperson of the Stop B2H Coalition, said Thursday the group filed the lawsuit because of a pending legal deadline to challenge the BLM's authorization of the proposed route.

The BLM's Record of Decision for B2H was signed Nov. 17, 2017. Kreider said legal challenges to that decision must be filed within two years.

"We had until this Friday to do something," Kreider said. "The clock was running out."

He said the Stop B2H Coalition had sought to avoid litigation by sending a letter to the BLM on Oct. 2 asking the agency to write a supplemental environmental impact statement that takes into account information about the possible effects of the power line that the coalition has gathered since 2017.

That letter reads, in part, "New information available since the (environmental impact statement) and (Record of Decision) were issued shows that the IPC (Idaho Power) cannot justify its 'need' for the B2H Project, and therefore it is unreasonable that BLM allow the project to proceed."

Kreider said the coalition didn't receive a response from the BLM. "The only thing we could do was file litigation to keep this alive," he said, referring to the coalition's challenge to the BLM's 2017 decision.

A lawsuit was not the group's

preferred option, Kreider said.

"Going to court's going to cost us a lot of money," he said.

The plaintiffs, who include Kreider and his wife, Fuji Kreider, who live less than half a mile from the proposed power line route, and Gail Carbiener of Bend, a member of the Oregon-California Trails Association, are represented by Portland attorneys David H. Becker, Oliver J. H. Stiefel and Maura C. Fahey.

Idaho Power is not a defendant in the lawsuit.

The defendants are the BLM, Theresa Hanley, the agency's acting state director for Oregon and Washington, the U.S. Forest Service and Tom Montoya, supervisor of the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest.

Jordan Rodriguez, a communications specialist for Idaho Power, said the company does not have a specific response to the lawsuit because the company is not a defendant.

"B2H remains an important priority for Idaho Power as we continue toward our goal of providing 100% clean, renewable energy by 2045," Rodriguez said. "We are continuing to work through the permitting process."

In the lawsuit, the plaintiffs contend Idaho Power's proposed route near La Grande is different from the route listed during the BLM's review prior to the agency's decision.

"There has been a lot of new information about the project's likely



EO Media Group file photo

A crew works on a transmission line tower outside of Boardman in November 2017.

destructive impacts on Eastern Oregon," Jim Kreider said. "We are trying to prevent catastrophic damage to our public and private lands by an out-of-state corporation which prioritizes profits for its shareholders."

The plaintiffs also claim the BLM's 2017 decision fails to take into account more recent data about declining populations of sage grouse in Baker County.

The lawsuit also cites potential public safety hazards along the proposed route, including plans to erect towers on unstable slopes

and creating excessive noise near homes, recreation areas and campgrounds.

The plaintiffs cite concerns that Baker County opponents to B2H have expressed since the power line was first proposed more than a decade ago — that the power line, and its towers up to 170 feet tall, would mar views from the Oregon Trail Interpretive Center.

The BLM manages the center, which opened in 1992 and has attracted more than 2.3 million visitors.

Critics tried to persuade the

BLM to require Idaho Power to bury the line near the Interpretive Center. The current proposed route would run the power line between the Interpretive Center and Interstate 84, along the route of an existing power line that crosses Highway 86 on Flagstaff Hill, about three miles east of Baker City.

Other issues cited in the lawsuit include:

- Wildfire danger. The lawsuit reads: "The (environmental impact statement) also did not take a 'hard look' at the risk of wildfire damage from the B2H transmission line. Significant new information, including the November 2018 Camp Fire in Paradise, California, that resulted in 85 fatalities and which was sparked by power transmission lines. ... illustrates the potential danger..."
- Mill Creek alternative route, which is within 2,000 feet of the La Grande city limits. The lawsuit reads: "The (environmental impact statement's) discussion of geologic hazards and slope instability ... does not disclose sufficient information about potential dangers. ... Significant new information, much of it developed in the (Oregon facility siting process) where Idaho Power first disclosed some of the likely impacts, shows that the geologic hazards and slope instability of the proposed transmission line near La Grande pose greater threats to human safety than disclosed in (the environmental impact statement)."

CHURCH

Continued from Page 1A

membership. Until then, the buildings were owned by the church congregation. Ownership, however, automatically reverted to the Conference after the church closed. The decision to sell the complex — the church building and its fellowship hall and parsonage — was made earlier this month.

The Conference had considered renting the complex to the Cove-Union-Powder Health Association. CUP had a verbal agreement with the Oregon-Idaho Conference for renting the fellowship hall and the church, according to CUP Treasurer Marty McKeon. This agreement, though, could not be finalized for financial reasons. McKeon said CUP could not afford the rent the Conference requested or the insurance it would have to pay.

Now that the buildings are for sale, the process of dispersing the church's furnishings, books, paintings, old photographs, worship items and much more is beginning. Items volunteers are working with include a painting of Jesus donated to the church decades ago by the parents of a son who died during World War II and a framed list of the names of all the pastors who have served the Union United Methodist Church.

About 10 church volunteers were at the church Wednesday organizing items for a public sale set for Nov. 22. It is a painful process for many because their family roots are tied to the church.

"There are lots of broken hearts around here," said Carolyn Young, whose parents celebrated their 50th anniversary in the church. Julie Bodfish of La Grande, who picked up a bookcase her family had donated to the church many years ago, shares Young's sentiment.

"My family started going here long ago. It is so sad to see it evaporate," she said.

Sean Crews, who serves as the coordinator of Northeast Oregon's Methodist Churches, observed the same thing Wednesday.



Dick Mason/The Observer

The Union United Methodist Church has been put up for sale by the Oregon-Idaho Conference of the United Methodist Church.

"It's not easy," he said. "Many have invested their lives in this church."

Crews said those working at the Union church are experiencing grief but they are also showing resilience by coming there and working.

"They do not have to be here," he said on Wednesday.

On a brighter note, Hall said the Conference will be providing funds for a permanent Union United Methodist Church memorial. The memorial could be in a number of forms including a wall.

A sale of the old church's items will be conducted

from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Nov. 22 inside its fellowship hall. The sale will take place in conjunction with a shredding fundraiser being conducted by the members of the former church's congregation. A shredding service will at the church from 10 a.m. to noon on Nov. 22, and the public may bring documents to be shredded

for a donation.

Funds raised by the shredding donations and the sale will go to the senior and community meals program in Union. For years, senior meals were served in the church's fellowship hall each Tuesday. After the Conference assumed ownership of the buildings, the meals continued to be served there, thanks to a verbal agreement between the CUP Health Association and the Conference.

The meals are now being provided at the VFW Hall by CUP, which began serving the meals there when the church buildings were put up for sale.

Kristen Caldwell, a spokesperson for the Oregon-Idaho Methodist Annual Conference, said it supports in spirit the senior meals program.

"We consider (serving) seniors to be a ministry," Caldwell said.

She said the Conference wants everything to work out for the best for Union and the historic church buildings.

"Hopefully we will be able to find a good buyer who will be faithful to the Union community," Caldwell said.

BARRETO

Continued from Page 1A

He feels it is time to return to that focus.

"I left the business in the hands of my family and employees and since then our volume of business has doubled," Barreto said. "That is what happens when you hire excellent people."

His announcement not to run again comes on the heels of losing his place in the House Republican leadership.

The caucus in September elected Rep. Daniel Bonham, The Dalles, to replace Barreto and voted out Carl Wilson of Grants Pass from minority leader in favor of freshman Rep. Christine Drazan of Canby. Barreto said losing the leadership spot made stepping away an easier choice.

"If I would have stayed in leadership, I would have stayed another term," he said.

When Wilson lost, Barreto said he felt no obligation to hang on as deputy.

Barreto is a staunch conservative, and despite being in the political minority, he said he succeeded in reaching across the aisle and got along with members of

both parties. He said there is definitely partisanship in the Legislature but basic courtesy can help overcome it.

"If you respect them, they will respect you," he said.

He alluded to the fact Republicans have less influence as Democrats gain more control of the Legislature. The Democrats picked up three seats in the 2108 House elections, giving them the supermajority they need to help raise taxes.

"The party in power dictates the ultimate future of the state," Barreto said.

Fellow Republican Rep. Greg Smith of Heppner said Barreto "was a good representative of the conservative Republicans of District 58."

Republican state Sen. Bill Hansell of Athena said he and Barreto worked together on a number of issues.

"I will miss him," Hansell said. "Greg is a good legislator and a good friend."

Barreto still has a year and two months to serve. He said a big part of working in leadership was recruiting candidates and that's something he will turn his attention to for the district.

The candidacy filing deadline is not until March 10, 2020.

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