

TODAY IN HISTORY

Today is Saturday, Feb. 27, the 58th day of 2021. There are 307 days left in the year.

TODAY'S HIGHLIGHT IN HISTORY:

On Feb. 27, 1933, Germany's parliament building, the Reichstag, was gutted by fire; Chancellor Adolf Hitler, blaming the Communists, used the fire to justify suspending civil liberties.

ON THIS DATE:

In 1922, the Supreme Court unanimously upheld the 19th Amendment to the Constitution, which guaranteed the right of women to vote.

In 1951, the 22nd Amendment to the Constitution, limiting a president to two terms of office, was ratified.

In 2003, children's television host Fred Rogers died in Pittsburgh at age 74.

In 2010, in Chile, an 8.8 magnitude earthquake and tsunami killed 524 people, caused \$30 billion in damage and left more than 200,000 homeless.

In 2015, actor Leonard Nimoy, 83, died in Los Angeles.

Fed court hears arguments over B2H line

By **MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI**
Capital Press

SALEM — Opponents of a 300-mile transmission line in Eastern Oregon claim the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's approval of the route across its property violated federal laws.

The Stop B2H Coalition — which is challenging the high-voltage power line between Boardman and the Hemingway substation in Idaho — is asking a federal judge to overturn BLM's permission for the project.

Among the transmission line's critics, the agriculture industry has raised concerns about the project taking prime farmland out of production and impeding farm practices.

The agency didn't comply with the National Environmental Policy Act by selecting a preferred route and a variant in 2017 that were different than what it had analyzed in a draft environmental study, according to the coalition.

The newly chosen route is problematic because it's only a half-mile from La Grande, runs across an intact portion of the Oregon Trail and passes near ecologically sensitive areas, critics say.

"The public had no way to anticipate the two new routes that would



EO Media Group, File

A crew works on a transmission line tower outside Boardman. Oral arguments were held in federal court over a proposed transmission line between Boardman and the Hemingway substation in Idaho.

run through that area. It deprived residents of La Grande and Union County of the right to weigh in on disproportionately adverse effects," said David Becker, attorney for the coalition, during Feb. 22 oral arguments.

The coalition also argues that BLM didn't properly evaluate the transmission line's "synergistic" effects with live-stock grazing, which the group argues will have cumulative impacts on the sage grouse in the region.

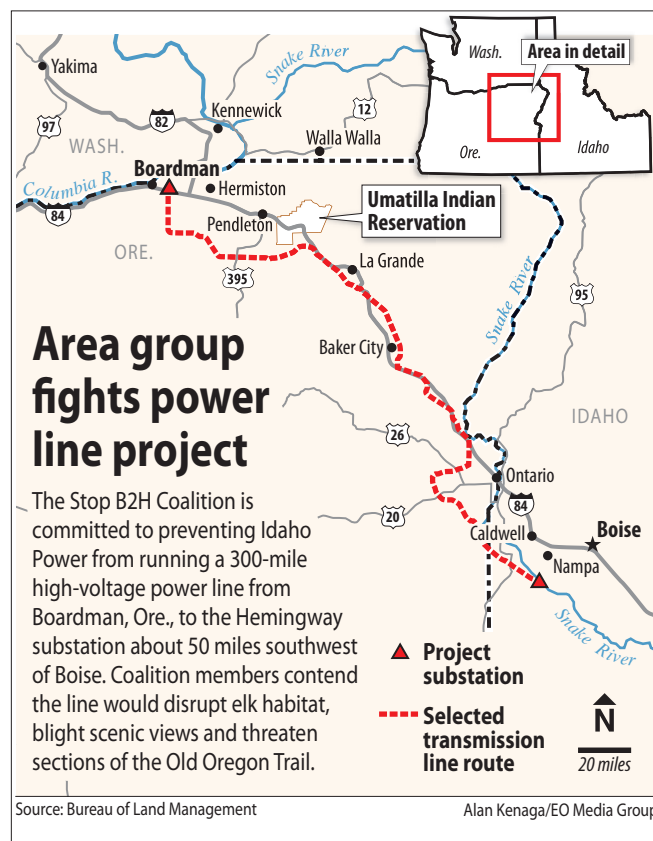
The BLM and Idaho Power, the utility company that would construct the project, are defending an inadequate NEPA analysis of the transmission line's effects, Becker said. "They really are trying to piece together and point the

court in 25 different directions and say, 'We deserve deference.'"

The BLM countered its preferred route was a permissible "logical outgrowth" of alternatives examined in a draft environmental impact statement, or EIS, and doesn't require a supplemental NEPA study.

The agency wasn't required to study burying a section of the power line and it sufficiently evaluated the implications of grazing while examining the route's effects on vegetation, said Krystal-Rose Perez, attorney for the BLM.

"The EIS is not organized in the way plaintiffs want, but it's up to BLM's discretion how to disclose that information," she said.



Area group fights power line project

The Stop B2H Coalition is committed to preventing Idaho Power from running a 300-mile high-voltage power line from Boardman, Ore., to the Hemingway substation about 50 miles southwest of Boise. Coalition members contend the line would disrupt elk habitat, blight scenic views and threaten sections of the Old Oregon Trail.

Source: Bureau of Land Management

Alan Kenaga/EO Media Group

Similarly, the agency doesn't have to arrive at the conclusions preferred by the opponents, Perez said. "I don't think there's any question NEPA does not mandate particular results."

Beth Ginsberg, an attorney for Idaho Power, said that both the Obama and Trump administrations have recognized the transmission line as a critical connection between the electrical grids of the Pacific West and Intermountain West.

"The importance of a project like this cannot be understated," Ginsberg said. "No shortcuts were taken. Every I was dotted, every T was crossed."

The BLM conducted the necessary analysis of the project's impacts on sage grouse populations, but this information doesn't need to be isolated in a special "cumulative impacts" section, she said.

"This is a 'gotcha,'" Ginsberg said. "This is another example of trying to weaponize NEPA."

CORRECTION

The Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021, feature "Changing of the sheriff" misstated information about Union County Sheriff Cody Bowen. He moved to Pendleton to follow his significant other, who was attending Blue Mountain Community College.

Cruising La Grande in style



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

Matthew Henneke and his horse-drawn carriage cross Fourth Street and Jefferson Avenue in La Grande on Tuesday, Feb. 23, 2021.

Union County to open offices March 1 in Chaplin Building

By **DICK MASON**
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Union County is set to reopen three offices it has kept closed the past three months due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The Union County assessor, clerk and planning offices all will welcome the public back in the Chaplin Building, 1001 Fourth St., La Grande, starting the morning of Monday, March 1. The three offices will be open 8:30 a.m. to 5 p.m. Monday through Thursday, and the clerk's office will be open as well on Fridays 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. The offices will close on weekdays for lunch noon to 1 p.m.

The closure is ending because Union County moved out of Oregon's extreme risk category for COVID-19 to moderate, which went into effect Friday, Feb. 26. Union County Clerk Robin Church said she is delighted for the change.

"I'm excited to be open to the public again," Church said.

She said she appreciates how patient and understanding people have been while her office has

been closed to the public, forcing its staff to do their work via phone and electronically.

"People have been very good," Church said.

The Union County Clerk's office closed last summer to the public and then reopened Sept. 1 so it could better handle matters related to the then upcoming November 2020 general election. The clerk's office closed again Nov. 18 by order of the state. The planning and assessor offices have been closed since the summer of 2020.

Church said everyone coming into the Chaplin Building older than 5 will be required to wear masks.

"If you refuse to wear a mask, don't come. Call and someone will meet you outside of our building to help you take care of business," Church said.

COVID-19 restrictions limit occupancy to just three people at one time, including children, in the lobbies of the offices. The planning and assessor offices share a lobby while the county clerk's office has its own.

Church said individuals coming to the clerk's

office to purchase a marriage license must schedule an appointment and limit their visit to 30 minutes. They will need to have all of their information ready plus photo identification and a payment of \$50 with them.

People applying for a passport at the clerk's office also must make an appointment and limit their visit to 30 minutes and bring all their necessary materials and information, including birth certificate and valid identification, according to a Union County press release. The county will accept one check for the processing fee and one for each application. Passport applicants also must have their application form completed at the time of their appointment.

"You will not be allowed to fill out forms at our counter," Church said.

Passport applicants who are not ready will need to make another appointment and come back.

The Union County Clerk's public resource room also will be open for limited use starting March 1 with a limit of three people at a time.

Teachers offered certificate in trauma-informed education

The Observer

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University's new Trauma in Educational Communities Certificate responds to increased isolation, illness and financial hardship many families face.

EOU opened the certificate for enrollment in fall 2020, and it is the only one of its kind the Oregon Teacher Standards and Practices Commission rec-

ognizes. According to a press release from the university, teachers who complete the certificate program can add a specialization to their teaching license. With 18 credits spread over six courses students can earn the certificate in just less than a year, fully online.

"The program is intended to continue the professional development of educators who seek the skills and knowledge

needed to work effectively in their classrooms and in their larger school communities to support students who have experienced trauma," education professor Karyn Gomez said in a university press release. "Classroom and school-wide practices that support students and provide trauma-informed learning environments will ultimately provide a more equitable education for all students."

Wallowa County-raised filmmaker looks at wildfire impact in new film

By **ELLEN MORRIS BISHOP**

For the Wallowa County Chieftain

WALLOWA COUNTY — After last summer, there's no doubt the West has entered an era of catastrophic forest fires.

"The West is Burning," a new feature-length documentary film shot, produced and directed by Wallowa County native Cody Sheehy, explores this new era of megafires and offers solutions that can bring greater prosperity to rural communities. It aired Thursday night, Feb. 25, on Oregon Public Broadcasting.

The late Doug McDaniel inspired and launched the film.

"A key thing for Doug was how management practices, management objectives and market values have changed," said Nils Christoffersen, executive director of Wallowa Resources. "A lot of pri-

vate landowners in Eastern Oregon are good examples of how we can do forest stewardship, protect wildlife and salmon habitat, reduce fire risk, and still make some money from (our land). We wanted to ... create a movie that put this story in front of people."

Wallowa Resources served as a launching pad and home base for the project.

"We pulled this together on a fairly tight budget thanks to the support of the University of Arizona and a lot of colleagues and friends across the West who we've worked with for two decades," Christoffersen said.

They engaged Sheehy, a Wallowa-born filmmaker who holds a master's degree in range ecology and has



Sheehy



Christoffersen



Webb

won two Emmys for his documentaries.

"If you want to get a story in front of as many people as possible, you need to frame it around what is attracting the most public, political and media attention," Sheehy told Christoffersen.

And so, they focused on recent megafires.

"As a kid, growing up in a former logging town ... we didn't have fires like this," Sheehy said. "I wanted to know what had changed and what we could do about it."

The film, two years in the making, begins with the catastrophic wildfires in California and Oregon from 2015-20, including the 110,000-acre Canyon Creek Complex fire near John Day, then moves into



Contributed Photo

"The West is Burning," shot, produced and directed by Wallowa County native Cody Sheehy, examines why megafires have become annual catastrophes across the West and what we can do about them. Oregon Public Broadcasting aired the film Thursday, Feb. 25, 2021.

how practices in forest management have changed over time. It also explores community actions that are reducing catastrophic wildfire risk and opportunities to revitalize rural economies. Those include new forest products, from biochar to new innovations

like nanocrystalline cellulose made from wood pulp that can be used in the clear part of windows as tuneable reflective filters in smart windows.

Mark Webb, executive director of the Blue Mountain Forest Partners and a former Grant County

judge, is included among those looking to improve forest management practices and economic opportunities. His community was hit hard by the 2015 Canyon Creek Complex fire.

"I think the general message (of the film) is right," Webb said. "The status quo is unacceptable. We can't continue to move forward without changing how we manage our landscapes. That's going to require a change in attitude as well as new partnerships and relationships and acknowledging that maybe we got some things wrong in the past."

Wallowa Resources is developing educational guides so the film can be used in the classroom. There are also plans to offer Filmstacker, a video platform for collaborative storytelling, to generate community-based learning and action.