

## B2H

Continued from Page A1

in the five recent court filings include parcels owned by Hans and Susan Finke, of Wilsonville; Justin and Savannah Gyllenberg, of Baker City; Dean, Rex and Susan Nelson, of Baker City; the Harrell Land and Cattle LLC, of Baker City; and Mike Ragsdale, of Baker City.

The Gyllenbergs' 175-acre property is along Highway 30, just south of Interstate 84 between Baker City and Pleasant Valley.

The Finkes' land, covering about 288 acres, is in the northern part of Baker Valley, near Highway 203 east of the freeway.

The Nelson property, north of Interstate 84 near the Pleasant Valley interchange, is about 941 acres.

The Harrell property, which is about 2 miles east of the freeway and just south of Highway 86 near the base of Flagstaff Hill, covers about 120 acres.

Ragsdale's property is just north of the Harrell parcel and covers about 50.5 acres, according to records from the Baker County Assessor's Office.

Savannah Gyllenberg said she and her husband have lived on their property for about seven and a half years. She said they received packages from Idaho Power a few months ago with forms to sign granting the company access, but the couple haven't had time to review the documents.

Gyllenberg said an existing Idaho Power transmission line crosses their property, and they have never objected to company workers entering the property to maintain the line.

The five petitions have nearly identical wording, differing mainly in the legal descriptions of the specific parcels involved.

In each petition, Idaho Power states that either the company or its contractor, Cornerstone Energy Inc. 21, acting on the company's behalf, has "contacted the Respondent several times to request access to survey, test, and sample the Property. Respondent has not granted Idaho Power access to the Property."

Berg said the company needs access to the properties to do a variety of surveys.

"Because construction on the B2H project is scheduled to start as early as 2023, Idaho Power must begin surveying, testing, and sampling the Property in 2022," each of the four petitions states.

## Denied access

Berg said Idaho Power sends three letters to each property owner before filing petitions in court.

"We prefer to work directly through landowners, and we encourage people (who are respondents in court filings) to contact us as soon as they can," Berg said. "We much prefer to handle it out of court. We don't want to force the issue in court."

Berg said the owners of about 65% of the private land in Baker County that is along the line's proposed route have given Idaho Power access for surveys and inspections.

Of the remaining 35%, most have not responded to the company's requests, he said, and two property owners have denied access to their land.

He declined to say whether either of those property owners is among the five that are the subject of the company's current court petitions.

## STORM

Continued from Page A1

La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza said he decided on the evening of Jan. 2 to close school because of reports he was receiving from Mid Columbia Bus Company, which serves his district, and from Union County officials.

Their reports indicated that driving school buses would be unsafe, he said.

Mendoza also said the forecast of winds of up to 55 mph and another 4 inches of snow expected on Jan. 3 factored into his decision.

Extreme winter weather also forced Eastern Oregon University, La Grande, to close on Jan. 3. Employees and on-campus partners were not required to report for work. On-campus classes were canceled and offices were closed, but online courses were expected to continue, according to an EOU press release.

## Crews clear snowdrifts

City of La Grande Public Works Director Kyle Carpenter said his snow-removal crews began work at 2 a.m. Jan. 3 in an effort to clear snow. La Grande crews focused on clearing drifts that had shut down a number city streets, including the stretch of Cove Avenue from 26th Street to McAlister Road, Gekeler Lane from 20th Street to Highway 30, and Mulholland Drive from 26th Street to Walton Road.

"We hope to have all those cleared by the end of the day," Carpenter said at about 7:30 a.m. on Jan. 3.

Carpenter said that on Jan. 2 crews did limited snow removal because more high winds were projected. He said that any work done on Jan. 2 could have been quickly erased with new snowdrifts.

The vehicles the city is using to clear snow include three trucks and three graders.

Carpenter said that the latest information on road closures and plans for plowing is available on the city of La Grande's Facebook page.

The city of Island City closed Buchanan Lane west of McAlister Road and Walton Road south of Emily Drive on Jan. 2, because of drifting snow. The closures were still in effect at 10:30 a.m. Jan. 3.

"We are working on getting them open but it



Alex Wittwer/The Observer

**A truck driver makes his way past lines of trucks, toward the Flying J truck stop on Highway 30 on Monday, Jan. 3, 2021. Severe weather and snowdrifts closed Interstate 84 as crews struggled to clear the roadways.**

feels like a losing battle," said Karen Howton, Island City's city recorder.

Union County Public Works Director Doug Wright said at 7:30 a.m. Jan. 3 that many roads are blocked by snow.

"There are localized snowdrifts throughout the county," he said.

Union County Public Works crews are tackling these drifts with the help of six graders, one snowblower and four trucks. Wright speaks philosophically of the challenge of keeping roads clear of snow.

"It is what we do," he said. "We want to help folks get to where they need to be."

The snowdrifts were blown in after Union County received significant snowfall on Dec. 30-31. No information on how much snow Union County received on those two days was available from the National Weather Service at press time, but Carpenter estimated that on Dec. 31 alone portions of La Grande may have received a foot of snow.

It is very likely that a record was set on the last day of 2021, for the highest recorded snowfall for La Grande on Dec. 31 is 1-1/2 inches in 1990, according to the National Weather Service. The agency's snowfall records for La Grande date back to 1966.

## Chill sets records

La Grande started 2022 with record low temperatures. The low on Jan. 1, at 4:49 a.m. was minus 22 degrees, breaking the old record for Jan. 1 of minus 12 set in 1979. A record was also set on Dec. 31 when the temperature fell to minus 11 degrees at about 11:30 p.m., breaking

the old record of minus 3 degrees in 1969. The National Weather Service records for La Grande temperatures date back to 1965.

Wallowa County also had a frigid start to the new year. Lostine had a low of minus 13 degrees on Jan. 1 and a low of minus 8 degrees on Dec. 31. The National Weather Service does not have temperature records for Lostine but it does for Wallowa, which is 8 miles to the northeast. Wallowa's all-time low for Dec. 31 is minus 22 degrees in 1927, and its all-time low for Jan. 1 is minus 14 degrees, a mark set in 1979.

## ODOT stretched thin

The Oregon Department of Transportation reported it has been an all-hands-on-deck situation as crews worked to remove snowdrifts and white-out conditions along Interstate 84.

"We're holding our own, but it's really busy," said Tom Strandberg, a spokesperson for ODOT Region 5, which encompasses most of Northeastern Oregon. "Our crews are out there, struggling with the weather — and some areas of Umatilla County they're not even able to plow because of the winds blowing so hard. It's creating drifts and blizzard-like conditions. It's just a mess."

Interstate 84 was closed multiple times from Jan. 2 throughout Jan. 3, opening later in the afternoon on Jan. 3 as road crews cleared a lane of traffic between Pendleton to La Grande eastbound, while all lanes of westbound traffic was cleared by approximately 1:30 p.m. Additionally, Oregon Highways OR-11, OR-334

and OR-204 remained closed due to snowdrifts and inclement weather as road crews worked to clear the obstructions, according to TripCheck.

ODOT also reported that a number of motorists had ignored the roadblocks, traveled onto the freeway and found themselves stuck in the snowdrifts, or even blown over by the high winds. At least one truck and one ODOT portable message board was blown off the road due to the winds. With the inclement weather and limited resources, those stuck could be stranded for hours — and possibly days — before crews are able to dig them out.

"They might be stuck up there for hours and hours with no chance of rescue," Strandberg said. "We just want to remind people to stay home and stay off the roads. If it's closed, don't go on it. Don't try to drive through drifts. If you get stuck, you may not get rescued anytime soon."

Conditions aren't likely to improve either, Strandberg said, citing weather reports calling for more snow and high winds.

"We're keeping an eye on road and weather conditions, and trying to get our equipment out there as soon as possible to open things back up," he said, "but in some cases, it's a losing battle — they can't plow the snow because they can't drive fast enough to move the snow off the road."

But severe weather and high winds balding the Blue Mountains' snowpack and blanketing the highway with snow isn't the only issue ODOT is facing. A number of employees themselves were stuck at home due

to snowdrifts, and at least one employee was out sick. As well, the agency has faced its own shortages with a lack of snowplow drivers, unfilled positions and understaffing.

"It's going to take some time, and people need to understand and be patient," Strandberg said. "This is a weather event we have no control over. We'll continue to address what we can, but there are going to be some routes we can't even do maintenance on because we can't see — and if we can't see we can't drive."

## In Wallowa County

Wallowa County also has a large amount of drifting snow. This has forced the closure of Hurricane Creek Road and Highway 350, according to Kari Carper, an administrative assistant for Wallowa County's public works department. Hurricane Creek Road is a county road and Highway 350 is a state road. Both roads have been closed since at least early Jan. 3.

A number of roads in Wallowa County, which are not closed, also have a lot of snowdrifts making driving difficult, Carper said, adding that county public works crews are working hard to clear roads as fast they can.

"Our crews were up early trying to get everything open," she said.

## An increase in crashes

The Oregon State Police reported 54 accidents over the holiday weekend across Eastern Oregon counties from Morrow to Malheur, a five-fold increase since 2017 when they responded to just 10 accidents.

That number has been steadily climbing, with 31 accidents reported in 2020, and 23 reported in 2019 between Dec. 31 and Jan. 2.

Statewide, OSP responded to 259 accidents during the same time period this year, up 186% from its 2017 count, and 25% from its 2020 numbers.

A number of OSP service vehicles at the La Grande headquarters were also buried in a small mountain of snow due to the drifts.

In La Grande, local law enforcement officers responded to 17 reports of accidents, disabled vehicles or stuck drivers on Jan. 1.

Police also responded to a down power line, a fallen tree and a stop sign that had blown over in the wind.

## TUTU

Continued from Page A1

conference Tutu spoke at. Tutu, who died Dec. 26, 2021, at the age of 90, was well known but not yet in the international spotlight in 1983.

He was a year away from being awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his nonviolent opposition to apartheid in South Africa. Tutu, on the verge of major celebrity status, was able to move about freely in Northeastern Oregon.

"He was not well known yet. I think it was fun for him to be anonymous," Gretchen Kimsey, who lives in The Dalles, said.

Kimsey marveled at Tutu's ability to connect and communicate with people using plainspoken brilliance at the conference in Cove.

"He never spoke in complex terms. He spoke straight to the heart," she said.

Kimsey was also struck by Tutu's sense of humor, which he displayed during his visit to Northeastern Oregon and throughout his life.

"He brought laughter to a lot of people's lives, and we all know how healing laughter can be," she said.

Kimsey said her husband shared Tutu's sense of humor.

"That is what drew them together," she said.

## A great spirit

Jim Hayes, of Joseph, then an eighth grader, was among the younger people who attended the 1983 conference at the Ascension Camp in Cove. Hayes said he was struck by the sense of happiness Tutu exuded.

"He was joyful, a great person," he said.

The Wallowa County resident grew more impressed with Tutu following the conference when he learned what he had endured while fighting apartheid in South Africa.

"I didn't understand how, after what he had gone through, he could have such great spirit," Hayes said.

The Rev. Churchill G. Pinder, of the Episcopal Church, who then lived in Baker City, was impressed with stories Tutu shared of his life in a close-knit setting.

"We all had the privilege of sitting at the feet of Desmond as he shared his experiences with the struggles in South Africa as well as his journey of faith," he said. "I clearly remember him describing his experiences of being very sick as a young child in a hospital and the impression he had when an Anglican priest

came and visited him and prayed with him. Desmond shouted with glee, 'For me. What a wonder God's love is.'"

Pinder said the magnitude of the experience is hard to put into words.

"How can I explain the wonder of enjoying all the activities of Family Camp including playing softball, singing around the campfire, and eating meals with Desmond Tutu and his family and many of the members of the Diocese of Eastern Oregon," he said.

Pinder was ordained a deacon in the Episcopal Church at the Ascension School Camp during a ceremony conducted by Tutu and Rustin Kimsey.

Sarah Moore, a former reporter for The Observer, who attended the conference, said that Tutu was always accessible.

"It was such an intimate setting. Everyone had access to a famous

person. He was always willing to sit down and talk at meals and outside," said Moore, who now lives in Orcas Island, Washington, with her husband, David, who was the rector of St. Peter's Episcopal Church in La Grande 40 years ago.

Moore said Tutu accepted the invitation to come to Cove because he knew Rustin Kimsey so well.

"His friendship with Rustin Kimsey is what made it happen," she said.

Rustin Kimsey died in 2015, and Tutu was among those who attended his service in The Dalles. Tutu came unannounced, Gretchen Kimsey said, because he did not want to take away attention from his friend.

"We were so happy to see him," Gretchen Kimsey said. "It was such a wonderful gesture."

**Careers that make a difference**  
Work with people with disabilities!

**www.ImpactOregon.careers**

**impact**

**dish** **BRING EVERYTHING YOU LOVE TOGETHER!** **Blazing Fast Internet!**  
ADD TO YOUR PACKAGE FOR ONLY **\$19.99** where available

**2-YEAR TV PRICE GUARANTEE** **\$69.99** MO. for 12 Mos. **America's Top 120 Package 190 CHANNELS** Including Local Channels!

**CALL TODAY - For \$100 Gift Card** Promo Code: DISH100

**1-866-373-9175** Offer ends 4/13/22

**dish** **ALLSTATE**

All offers require credit qualification. 24-month commitment with early termination fee and 4-6¢/PpV. Prices include Hopper Duo for qualifying customers. Hopper Duo is \$15/mo. Hopper Duo is \$15/mo. Light fees may apply based on credit qualification.

**Prepare for unexpected power outages with a Generac home standby generator**

**SCHEDULE YOUR FREE IN-HOME ASSESSMENT TODAY!**  
**877-557-1912**

**FREE** 7-Year Extended Warranty\*  
A \$695 Value!  
Offer valid March 16, 2020 - June 30, 2020

**Special Financing Available**  
Subject to Credit Approval

**GENERAC**

\*Terms & Conditions Apply