

Idaho Power files 13 petitions in Umatilla, Morrow counties

Petition would allow utility to enter and survey landowners' private property

By **ERICK PETERSON**
East Oregonian

PILOT ROCK — Richard and Jean Hemphill can look out the window of their Pilot Rock home and see where massive towers will stand and carry the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line.

Those towers will stand 100-140 feet tall, according to Idaho Power Co., the primary force behind the 500-kilovolt line that would stretch almost 300 miles from a substation in southwestern Idaho to Boardman.

The Hemphills traced the route with their hands. They said they felt bad about a line that they believe will mar the beauty of the area.

"I love it," Jean Hemphill said of her view, pre-B2H. "In the summertime, I sit out on the deck in the evenings and enjoy this beautiful view all the way around. I'm always sorry when winter comes and I can't do that anymore. I truly love it."

She and her husband are the respondents in a petition for precondemnation that attorneys for Idaho Power filed. The petition, if a judge grants it, would allow Idaho Power to enter and survey their property.

The petition is one of seven Idaho Power filed in Umatilla County to gain access to private property, according to state court filings. The company has filed six petitions in Morrow County and about two dozen more in Malheur, Baker and Union counties.

Jean Hemphill said her family moved to a nearby property in 1942. She and her husband moved into their home after its construction in the early 1970s. "For us, who have



Jean Hemphill flips through a folder of information on the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line Wednesday, Feb. 2, 2022, at her home near Pilot Rock.

lived here all our lives, we cherish our lands and our views," Jean Hemphill said.

While many areas nearby have grown a great deal, they said their own view has changed little, by comparison, since they moved in roughly half a century ago.

The region means a great deal to them, they said. Both Hemphills trace their family tree to ancestors who farmed the land with their hands.

The land also is meaningful to the Hemphills because of their dreams for the future.

"My granddaughter's starting a sheep herd," Jean Hemphill said. She said it would be nice to have this land available for her granddaughter and future generations.

Idaho Power claims surveys necessary

Sven Berg, Idaho Power's communications specialist, said permitting

on the project will conclude sometime this year, and geotechnical, cultural and biological surveys are underway now. These surveys will reveal important information, he said, such as area wildlife and archaeological sites.

"We're working with landowners along the route to try to negotiate rights of entry to their property and easements," he said.

These easements would give Idaho Power and its partner on B2H, PacificCorp, rights to land use on properties where they may someday build a structure, Berg explained.

He said there are 98 parcels that 47 landowners own where the companies need right of entry. These include not just properties on the route, but ones that need to be crossed to access other lands, public and private, he said.

There will be hundreds of towers, and the entire line will be over ground,

Berg said. He described them as steel lattice and H-frame structures. The steel lattice structures average 140 feet tall with a 40-foot-by-40-foot footprint. The steel H-frame towers are, on average, 100 feet tall, he said.

These are large structures, he said, but landowners will be able to farm under and around them. He added there are no safety concerns from electromagnetic frequencies, as long as you are not "right up on them."

The power companies would make one-time payments to the landowners as compensation, Berg said.

B2H affects ranchers but helps data centers

Jim Doherty, chair of the Morrow County Board of Commissioners, expressed mixed feelings about the line. He said he has spoken with landowners, including cattle ranchers, to hear their anger. For himself, he

said, he also has negative feelings.

"Generally, I'm kind of opposed to it," he said.

Adding tons of steel and wires across Mother Earth is not ideal, he said, but the construction of the Longhorn substation is an \$80-\$100 million project and would make possible new data centers and other area businesses.

"There are a lot of things looking for that power and needing it, and there's a shorter and shorter supply down here all the while," Doherty said.

He could get behind the project, he said, if the route could be altered to do less harm to local landowners.

"We're taking one for the team, and those cattle ranchers on the century farms that built Morrow County, they're really taking one for the team," the commissioner said.

He said the county board, at this point, lacks leverage in this situation.

He said he would like to see the route changed or landowners receive a larger payout for easements, but the county does not have power over this. He said a previous Morrow County Board of Commissioners may have been able to do something, but the opportunity has passed.

Feeling powerless in face of power line

On the land Idaho Power soon will survey for the transmission line, the Hemphills farm wheat. That property alone is 1,000 acres, they said. Jean Hemphill said her family has owned that particular piece of land since 1917.

One family member died of the flu epidemic of the early 20th century, she recalled, and others lived on the land without indoor plumbing. This is a land that has a lot of history, she said. Some of the history even predates her family's ownership. One landmark on the property is a stone structure, which may have been made during conflicts with Native Americans, she said.

And though the Hemphills have many more acres in the area, they said they are far from royalty. Just as the land has a history of people struggling, the Hemphills said they have their own concerns. Rising costs for seed, fuel and chemicals have made business difficult, they said.

The planned construction of B2H has added to their worries. They said they are upset about work disrupting their farming. Also, they are bothered by the possibilities that towers will trouble farming and wildlife, long after they receive their one-time payment.

"It's been really, really hard," Jean Hemphill said.

She said she believes the line is inevitable, and she and her husband are powerless in comparison to much more powerful groups that are set on the line.

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