

# THE OBSERVER

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## New program introduces art of wall climbing

La Grande grade school students learn how to scale EOU's climbing wall

By **DICK MASON**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — It appeared that winter was in the rearview mirror in the Grande Ronde Valley on Friday, Feb. 11.

The mild and sunny weather had an air of perfection. Still, none of the 24 students in Kylinn Irwin's fourth grade class at Central Elementary School were complaining about being indoors. In fact, they seemed to care about only two things — scaling portions of Eastern Oregon University's climbing wall at Quinn Coliseum or helping a classmate during the new La Grande School District program.

The climbing wall, complete with footholds, looked a bit daunting but that did not prevent each of the students from scaling at least a portion of it and then rappelling down from it.

Ruthi Davenport, a EOU education professor emerita, who helped found the new program, was proud of the students' efforts, noting that they caught on quickly.

"They were dancing on the rock," she said.

The program Davenport helped found is Team 5C, which is providing all La Grande School District students in grades 3-5 an opportunity to learn how to wall climb during a pair of one-hour sessions. The Team 5C program started in January and will conclude at the end of April. Classes will begin attending their second sessions in early March.

Davenport, along with Michael Hatch, EOU's outdoor program director, lead the wall climbing sessions and are working in collaboration with La Grande School District Superintendent George Mendoza and

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# Fighting the power

Idaho Power seeks access to private property ahead of B2H approval



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Greg Larkin, along with his blue heeler, Killie, stands outside the home he is building on his property near Morgan Lake Road on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022.

By **DAVIS CARBAUGH**  
The Observer

LA GRANDE — Greg Larkin has worked for decades to create his dream retirement spot off the grid south of Morgan Lake. That dream could be off the table if proposed electricity lines are installed on his property.

Idaho Power Company is attempting to establish a 500-kilovolt line across Eastern Oregon that would extend approximately 300 miles from Boardman to Hemingway, Idaho. For locals like Larkin, the lines present a number of issues such as lowered property value and an overall decrease in the serenity of the land in question.

"The site view with the towers going across and the static hiss of the line, I think it will destroy the peace and tranquility of the lake," Larkin said.

And in Larkin's case, the line could have serious negative health repercussions.

As Idaho Power pushes forward with its plans for the B2H transmission line, the company



Alex Wittwer/EO Media Group

Greg Larkin, owner of a parcel of land off Morgan Lake Road, on Saturday, Feb. 12, 2022, points out a map where the Boardman to Idaho power line project would cross his property.

has filed about a dozen civil petitions in Union County Circuit Court to gain access to private property in order to conduct surveys and examinations on the land. The company's verbiage in the petitions indicates that work could begin as early as 2023, if approved.

### The sound of silence

Larkin, a native of La Grande, has owned 160 acres just south of Morgan Lake

since 1974. After moving back from The Dalles in the late 1990s, he has spent countless hours working to build up the land and create an ideal retirement location. In addition, work has been done on the trees and topography of the land to make the acreage as silent as possible.

The silence is important because Larkin suffers from tinnitus, a constant ringing in the ears that makes him sensi-

tive to buzzing and loud noises. The crackling and hissing of the B2H power lines could force the landowner into an unlivable situation.

"I choose to live off the grid because of my tinnitus," Larkin said. "It's as close to the wilderness as I can get without fully being in the wilderness."

Larkin spent his professional years as a locomotive engineer, before leaving that job because of the tinnitus. He now tends to his horses and works on his new two-story house and shop as he copes with his hearing issues and seeks to live a peaceful life alongside his dogs — his father owns an adjacent plot of land.

If the B2H plans were to go through, Larkin would have no choice but to leave the property he has spent so many years working on.

"If this transmission line were to go through at this location, I would no longer be able to reside or fulfill my lifetime dreams and goal of living here," Larkin said at a public hearing in June 2019. "And I

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## Raising better readers: Modern methods promise improved literacy

The Observer

LA GRANDE — By the end of third grade, about half of Oregon students have fallen behind in reading comprehension. Difficulty reading at this early stage often leads to lower achievement in school, as well as in adult life.

A new program developed by Eastern Oregon University's College of Education aims to equip teachers with tools and strategies to ensure more children stay on track.

Education professor Ronda Fritz founded the EOU Reading Clinic because her undergraduates needed opportunities to practice the structured literacy methods taught in her classes. She discovered that some in-service teachers weren't using these researched-based practice in their classroom curriculum.

"If we could train teachers, then our students would be able to practice in their classrooms. It's



Fritz

a dual model so pre-service teachers and in-service teachers receive training at different times of the year," Fritz said.

She partnered with the Oregon Trail Regional Education Network to incorporate the EOU Reading Clinic into teacher training schedules. The network, which covers Morrow, Union, Baker and Umatilla counties, also agreed to provide a \$2,000 stipend to teachers who

attend the clinic. Online instruction allows Fritz to reach rural Oregon's far-flung teachers, many of whom cope with even lower levels of reading proficiency in their schools.

"There's this inequity in reading instruction that leaves chunks of students unable to read," Fritz said. "In the U.S. 60% of kids are not at grade level by the end of third grade, and 50% in Oregon

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### CONTACT US

541-963-3161  
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La Grande, Oregon  
Email story ideas to [news@lagrandeobserver.com](mailto:news@lagrandeobserver.com).  
More contact info on Page A4.



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THURSDAY

SIDES DIVIDED OVER WOLF PROPOSAL

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