

# Farmers see help on transmission line

Proposed power line threatens valuable farmland, growers say

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI  
Capital Press

SALEM — Farmers near Boardman, Ore., hope state legislators will influence the U.S. Navy on the siting of a proposed transmission line.

Growers in the area fear that the power line — which Idaho Power plans to build from Boardman to Melba, Idaho — will take roughly \$30 million of irrigated farmland out of production.

An alternative to this possibility involves repurposing an existing easement that runs across the Navy's bombing

range near Boardman.

The size of the easement's footprint would not have to be increased, but the decision involves federal action and the Navy doesn't see the issue as a high priority, said Craig Reeder, vice president of Hale Farms.

Reeder asked members of the House Committee on Rural Communities, Land Use and Water to tell the Navy that the transmission line should not be built over farmland that's crucial to the region's economy.

The Navy has a requirement that the easement can only be repurposed if there are no viable alternatives, but a federal environmental study examines siting the transmission line on farmland in the region, said Don Rice, director of North American operations for

Greenwood Resources, which owns poplar tree farms in the area.

The state government could help convince the Navy that this option isn't actually viable, he said.

The entirety of the project spans more than 300 miles and is expected to cost up to \$1.2 billion, said Mitch Colburn, engineering leader for Idaho Power.

The transmission line is needed to improve the electrical grid's reliability and facilitate the expansion of renewable energy in the region, he said.

Aside from the Idaho Power transmission line, the region is facing other power line issues as wind turbine projects must find ways to connect to the Bonneville Power Administration's electrical grid along the Colum-

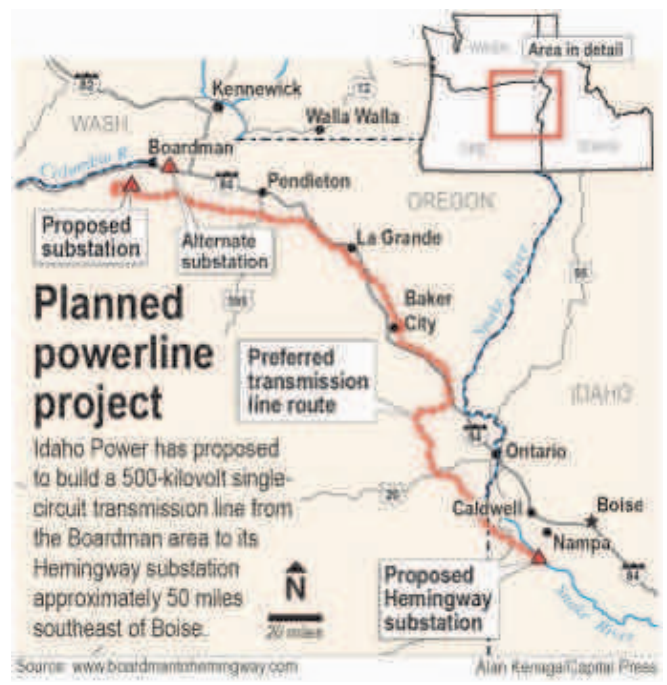
bia river, said Bob Levy, who farms near Hermiston, Ore.

There's currently a lack of planning, with wind energy projects winning approval from regulators before their developers figure out transmission routes, he said.

To compare, a builder cannot construct a house without showing how it will connect to existing infrastructure, Levy said.

The state should set a policy to plan for power corridors and to protect high-value irrigated farmland, said Reeder.

Currently, decisions are made based on soil type — while the sandy soils in the Boardman area are not considered the highest quality, they're nonetheless capable of growing high-value crops when irrigated, he said.



# Federal bill demands report on suspension of grain inspections

In the future, WSDA will have to give 72-hour notice

By DON JENKINS  
Capital Press

Federal legislation stemming in part from the Washington State Department of Agriculture's month-long suspension of grain inspections at the Port of Vancouver last year awaited President Barack Obama's signature Wednesday.

The multi-part Agricultural Reauthorization Act of 2015 includes provisions calling on the U.S. Department of Agriculture to prevent such potentially trade-disrupting suspensions from happening again.

Wheat growers escaped lasting damage, but another incident could harm relations with foreign buyers, Washington Association of Wheat Growers Executive

Director Michelle Hennings said Wednesday.

"We just can't have the situation happen again. If it happens again, we won't be as fortunate," she said. "We are very pleased with how the bill came out."

WSDA cited concerns for its workers' safety in suspending inspections at the United Grain terminal in the summer of 2014. For months, police had escorted inspectors as the International Longshore and Warehouse Union picketed the terminal. Gov. Jay Inslee withdrew state troopers in July, and the union and grain handlers reached a settlement the following month.

WSDA inspects grain shipments on behalf of the Federal Grain Inspection Service. In WSDA's absence, the USDA declined to take over, also citing safety concerns. The grain terminal said it could only export grain in which the buyer agreed to waive inspections.



Mateusz Perkowski/Capital Press File

Longshoremen picket in front of the United Grain facility in Vancouver, Wash., during a prolonged contract dispute. At one point, Gov. Jay Inslee withdrew state trooper escorts for state grain inspectors as they entered the facility so the inspectors could not do their job. Legislation passed by Congress requires the state to explain what happened and why.

"Under the circumstances, I don't think there was much that could have been done differently," WSDA Director Derek Sandison said Tuesday. "We'll see what circumstances exist if this issue comes up again."

as well."

HR2051 cleared Congress on Monday, three days before the grain inspection act expires.

It will require Agriculture Secretary Tom Vilsack to report within 180 days the "specific factors" that caused the suspension of grain inspections in Vancouver. Inspections continued at a grain terminal in Portland where longshoremen also were striking. The suspension of inspections in Vancouver drew immediate attention from federal lawmakers in other wheat-producing states.

The act also will require state agencies, such as WSDA, to give 72-hour notice that it will halt grain inspections. The USDA will have to report to Congress within 24 hours what it will do to resume inspections. In such cases, the USDA could call in government inspectors from other states.

Some grain lobbyists

pushed for the legislation to authorize USDA to use private inspectors in an emergency.

Hennings said the state wheat association favored the government retaining full responsibility to maintain credibility with foreign customers. "They feel there's stability there," she said.

Washtucna, Wash., farmer Brett Blankenship, president of the National Association of Wheat Growers, said the bill will provide the certainty wheat growers need.

"This bill establishes more transparency and ensures there is no disruption in inspection services should a delegated state agency discontinue providing services," he said in a written statement.

The Agriculture Reauthorization Act also will revise mandatory livestock reporting requirements and renew the National Forest Foundation Act.



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