

Coping with climate change

Umatilla Co. holds information workshop

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

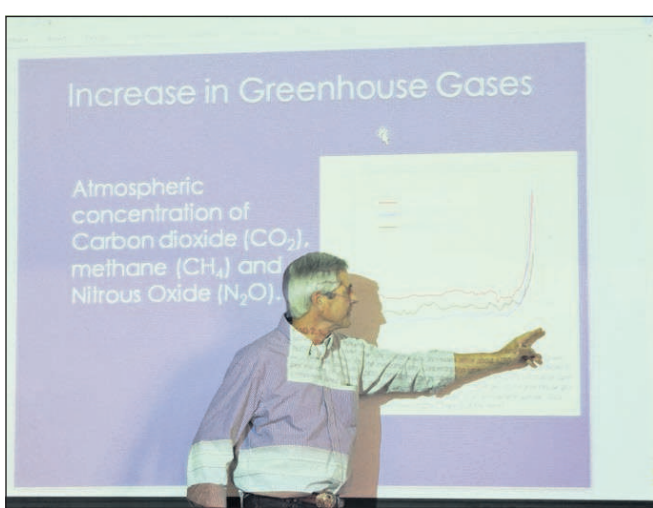
Umatilla County is feeling the effects of climate change, and has been for years.

But Jeff Blackwood said there are ways all of us can adapt.

Blackwood is a former supervisor of the Umatilla National Forest and a core member of the Umatilla County Climate Change Focus Group, which held public workshops Saturday in Pendleton at Blue Mountain Community College to discuss climate change and what we can do about it.

Temperatures in the Pacific Northwest have increased .09 degree Fahrenheit per decade since 1985, Blackwood said, and while that creep may seem slow, it means native plants are having a harder time living while invasive species are thriving.

And temperatures have increased while spring and summer stream flows have dropped since the early 1900s, he said, plus peak flows in local streams are coming 14 to 30 days earlier.



Staff photo by Phil Wright

Jeff Blackwood with the Umatilla County Climate Change Focus Group discusses the rise in greenhouse gases in the earth's atmosphere at the group's workshop Saturday in Pendleton.

The challenges are daunting, but Blackwood said climate change has brought about opportunities.

Researchers are working on how to make crops drought resistant, for example, he said, and there are government incentives to invest in renewable energy.

Haley Meisenholder said that includes the Solarize Pendleton program. She is the AmeriCorps intern in charge of the city of Pendleton's no-interest loan program to help residents install solar panels. And EnergyTrust of Oregon was

on site promoting ways to energy-help home owners and new home buyers curb their energy costs.

Roughly seven billion people now live on earth, Blackwood said, and that amount can make anyone question what difference they can make. But each individual effort, each contribution, can add up.

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners established the focus group to gather data and advise the county. Blackwood said the group is about information, not advocacy. The focus

group in March drew about 30 people to a workshop on how to better manage forests in the face of climate change.

Saturday's event, though, was its first real foray into getting information to a general audience. A dozen or so members of the public checked out the workshop during its four hours, and the flash thunderstorm that dumped rain over Pendleton may not have helped the outreach.

Still, focus group member Robert Hall said this is a start. And the next project is to get a website going and then hold another workshop this year on how climate change affects public health.

To find out more about Pendleton's program, visit www.pendleton.or.us/solarize or call 541-966-0248. Also check out energytrust.org or call the nonprofit at 1-866-368-7878 or email info@energytrust.org. And Umatilla Electric Cooperative offers free home energy audits. Call UEC at 800-452-2272 or visit online at www.umatillaelectric.com.

Contact Phil Wright at pwright@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0833.

DOE backs 500-megawatt wind farm

Wheatridge facility would span Umatilla and Morrow counties

By GEORGE PLAVEN
East Oregonian

The Oregon Department of Energy has recommended approving the site certificate for a proposed 500-megawatt wind farm in Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Wheatridge Wind Energy LLC wants to build up to 292 turbines between two main project areas, known as Wheatridge East and Wheatridge West. Wheatridge West would be located entirely within Morrow County about seven miles northwest of Heppner, while Wheatridge East would be 16 miles northwest of Heppner and extend into Umatilla County. The two areas would be 25 miles away from each other, connected by a pair of 230-kilovolt overhead power lines.

Before that can happen, the project must be approved by the state Energy Facility Siting Council, which has jurisdiction on wind developments greater than 105 megawatts. ODOE staff recommended approving Wheatridge in a draft proposed order issued April 27, and the siting council held its first public hearing May 19 at Boardman City Hall.

More than 50 people packed inside the city council chambers, though just a handful spoke on the record. Dana Heideman, of Ione, said he owns property within the neighboring Shepherds Flat Wind Farm and would support adding Wheatridge to the region.

"It's good for the economy in our area," Heideman said. "In the long run, I feel it's well worth the while."

Lois Duvall, of Lake Oswego, said she wants to see more wind power to help wean the state off fossil fuels. But not everyone who spoke was in favor. Irene Gilbert, of La Grande, took issue with the project's design, saying Wheatridge East and Wheatridge West ought to be treated separately in the permitting process.

"They function independently of one another," Gilbert said.

Gilbert also criticized the developer's plans to have a third party — specifically, Umatilla Electric Cooperative — construct and own the transmission lines that Wheatridge would use to connect onto the energy grid. Currently, UEC is looking into a route that would run 230-kilovolt lines up Bombing Range Road to a substation at the Port of Morrow.

In a letter sent May 13 to UEC, Gilbert questioned what ratepayers are getting in return for building the line, and who would use them if Wheatridge stalls.

"Either you plan to build this line and the plans

"It's good for the economy in our area. In the long run, I feel it's well worth the while."

Dana Heideman, lone

are not being influenced by Wheatridge, or these lines need to be included in the site certificate evaluation," Gilbert wrote.

UEC spokesman Steve Meyers said the co-op is looking into building a transmission corridor not only for Wheatridge, but that could serve other projects as well, including Idaho Power's Boardman to Hemingway proposal. No final decisions have been made, and Meyers said they are continuing to talk with property owners who might be affected.

Another route had been considered in Umatilla County, though Meyers said that is no longer in the discussion. Umatilla County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott said they were concerned about transmission permitted separately from the development itself, and how that might impact local farms.

Wheatridge CEO Jerry Rietmann said a single transmission corridor, carefully chosen by a local utility such as UEC, would be better for the area than having multiple transmission lines for multiple projects criss-crossing the landscape.

Rietmann said they have confidence in UEC coming up with the best possible plan for transmission, and not forcing a path where it doesn't belong.

"I think we're going to go where folks want us to go," Rietmann told the *East Oregonian*. "That will be driven by the market."

Wheatridge Wind Energy initially submitted its application with ODOE in 2013. With the department's analysis in the draft proposed order, Rietmann said he is confident they will be able to satisfy the state's requirements moving forward.

"I think we've addressed those concerns through the process," he said.

If permitted, Wheatridge would be built on more than 13,000 acres of private land. Rietmann said they are negotiating long-term leases with more than 20 landowners for the turbines. The Energy Facility Siting Council will hold a second public hearing on Monday, June 6 before making its decision. If the proposed order is not contested, ODOE will issue a final order and site certificate that will allow Wheatridge to break ground.

Contact George Plaven at gplaven@eastoregonian.com or 541-966-0825.

Spray gears up for rodeo, running

East Oregonian

The small Eastern Oregon town of Spray will swell with people as the 69th annual Spray Rodeo kicks off the Memorial Day weekend.

Slack performances start Friday at 11 a.m. at the Spray Rodeo Grounds. There's no charge for the day and concessions will be sold.

In its 52nd year, the 13.2-mile Eastern Oregon Half Marathon — the longest running half-marathon in Oregon — is Saturday at 8 a.m. On-site registration is \$40 and \$5 for a T-shirt, if available.

The race begins 1/4 mile north of Service Creek on Highway 19 and follows the scenic John Day River Valley, finishing in Spray. Bus transportation to the starting line departs at 7 a.m. at Spray High School. The event also includes a 5K and 10K run.

The parade starts at 11 a.m. at the Spray General Store. Serving as grand marshals are the Ellen Geissel family. Geissel follows in her father's footsteps — Hubert Asher, one of the event's founders, who was grand marshal in 1974.

A lifelong resident of Spray, Geissel began working at the Spray Post Office in 1968 and became postmaster in 1975. She retired in 2012. Geissel enjoys traveling with her husband, Lee, who also is a retired postmaster.

Geissel has worked behind the scenes at the Spray Rodeo for many years, selling tickets at the admission gate with her daughters, Allison Spurlock, Jaimie St. Laurent and Mystie Grover.

Bella Yanez of Corvallis is queen. A member of the Corvallis High School



Contributed photo

Ellen Geissel, far right, along with her daughters, Allison Spurlock, Jaimie St. Laurent and Mystie Grover, are being recognized as grand marshals for the 69th annual Spray Rodeo this weekend in Spray.

equestrian team, Yanez is also active in church, youth group and 4-H. She is the fourth member of her equestrian team to be named queen of the Spray Rodeo — a tradition that began six years ago when her coach was the rodeo's royalty.

Saturday and Sunday rodeo performances begin with a grand entry at 1 p.m. Tickets are \$10 for adults, \$5 for children 6-12 and free for kids under 6.

In addition, a Buckaroo Breakfast will be served both mornings from 6

a.m. to noon in the Spray High School cafeteria. Money raised will benefit the school's athletic teams. A cowboy church service is open to everyone Sunday from 9-10 a.m. in the arena grandstands.

For more information, call 541-468-2442 or visit www.sprayrodeo.com.

Contact community editor Tammy Malgesini at tmalgesini@eastoregonian.com or 541-564-4539.

BRIEFLY

Helix, Echo receive big grants

PENDLETON — Two small Umatilla County cities this week received several thousand dollars in local grants.

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners during its meeting Wednesday approved a \$51,000 grant for Helix to buy a new building and a \$25,000 grant for Echo for a walking trail.

Helix received \$51,000 as part of the 2014 and 2015 Helix Enhancement Launch Program, or HELP grants, toward the purchase of an equipment storage building. The city, population about 190, negotiated the purchase of property that included a storage facility for \$65,000.

The city, though, was short funds and asked the

county to pay the \$51,000 grant directly to AmeriTitle, which closed the sale Friday.

County attorney Doug Olsen in a memo on the deal noted the county has advanced grant funds in similar situations.

The board also approved a \$25,000 grant on the recommendation of the Echo Community Benefit Plan Committee. The funds will go toward the first half of creating a walking trail that includes a bench at the cemetery, exercise stations and signs.

The grant money comes from the Echo Windfarms Project, which the county noted has an approximate balance of \$74,000.

Echo, a city of about 700, plans to complete the project by 2018, according to the May 3 minutes of the benefit plan board, and raise the

remaining \$25,000 through other grants.

Umatilla County enacts immediate burn ban

PENDLETON — Umatilla County changed Monday's burn ban status from "good burn day" to a complete ban, effective at 2 p.m.

The county at about 2:15 p.m. Monday issued the change after a large wildfire burned hundreds of acres on the Umatilla Army Depot site near Hermiston.

Anyone who started



burning before the ban must make "reasonable efforts" to extinguish and/or minimize smoke from open burning, and no one may start new fires.

For more information, call the Umatilla County Planning Department at 541-278-6300.

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