

# Umatilla Electric general manager lauds BPA partnership as talk of privatization rises again

## Legislators share concerns about proposal to sell utility

By **GEORGE PLAGEN**  
East Oregonian

The latest proposal by the Donald Trump Administration to sell transmission lines owned by the Bonneville Power Administration may stir economic uncertainty for Umatilla and Morrow counties, according to the local Umatilla Electric Cooperative.

Robert Echenrode, UEC general manager, said he is not sure what such a deal would look like, but would inevitably carry questions that could slow down the rate of customer growth within the co-op service territory.

"(BPA) has certainly been a life support for us during our growth," Echenrode said. "We would hate to disrupt that momentum we have."

This is not the first time the government has suggested privatizing the agency's assets. The concept dates as far back as the Nixon administration, Echenrode said, and seems to rear its head again from time to time.

UEC, which serves more than 14,000 accounts from Boardman

to the Blue Mountains, buys the majority of its power wholesale from BPA, with nearly 85 percent generated by large hydroelectric dams on the Columbia River. The co-op signed its first contract with BPA in 1942, just five years after the agency was established by Congress.

"That's 75 years of partnership," Echenrode said. "They provide stability we might not otherwise see from a private enterprise."

And, unlike some other federal programs, Echenrode said BPA does not subsist on government handouts. Rather, it provides a dependable, self-sustaining service that members like UEC are more than happy to support.

Without that dependability, Echenrode said industries like data centers and food processors that have arrived in Eastern Oregon — and which require a tremendous amount of electricity — may think twice about locating in the future or expanding their operations.

Oregon lawmakers have

loudly denounced selling off BPA transmission to a private party. Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden has said BPA is "a key part of Oregon's economic future, and selling most of it to the highest bidder would strangle the power supply for businesses and stretch the wages of working families in the Northwest."

Wyden recently voted against Dan Brouillette, President Trump's nominee for deputy secretary of energy, because Brouillette did not commit to keeping BPA in public ownership.

"I cannot support a nominee who won't even say whether he opposes a proposal that would hike energy prices for Northwest customers who have invested in a system that runs successfully on its own," Wyden said.

Greg Walden, Oregon's only Republican congressman, also signed his name to a letter along with 14 other members of Congress voicing their opposition to the BPA proposal. The letter, which was sent to Secretary of Energy Rick Perry and Office of Management and Budget Director Mick Mulvaney, said selling transmission assets would harm individuals and busi-

nesses while undermining investment across the Northwest.

If a deal were made to sell BPA infrastructure, Echenrode said co-ops would likely argue that they are entitled to capacity on the system, since they have helped pay for its upkeep over the decades. He also questioned whether a third party would be able and willing to continue expanding the system to accommodate further growth.

Echenrode said UEC is working closely with the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association and National Rural Electric Cooperative Association to continue lobbying the issue.

"We just want to make sure, if there is some traction gained, where it's coming from and what their intentions are," he said.

### House Bill 3456

Meanwhile in Salem, a bill has passed the Oregon House of Representatives that would allow utilities to build solar farms on high-value farmland, provided the land is not within an irrigation district and does not otherwise have a water right.

The issue arose earlier this year, when UEC sought to expand its Moyer-Tolles Solar Station east of Umatilla. However, since the property is located within the Columbia Valley American Viticulture Area

and is thus defined as "high-value farmland," state law requires a special exception for any solar array larger than 12 acres.

"Our needs are greater than those limits," Echenrode said.

UEC did ultimately secure an exception for the project from the Umatilla County Board of Commissioners, but faced going through the same process in the future in order to meet Oregon's renewable energy mandate. The co-op has estimated it will need 100 megawatts of solar generation by 2025 to hit the benchmark.

Rep. Greg Smith (R-Heppner) sponsored the legislation to clear a path for UEC. The bill passed Wednesday by a vote of 54-4, with nays from Reps. Mike Nearman (R-Independence), Bill Post (R-Keizer), E. Werner Reschke (R-Klamath Falls) and Sherrie Sprenger (R-Scio).

Echenrode said he was pleased to see the legislation move forward to address what he described as shortcomings in the state's renewable portfolio standard.

"It will hopefully be in the Senate soon enough," Echenrode said.

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## BOARDMAN

### Suspected drunk driver leads high speed chase

East Oregonian

Police chased a suspected drunk driver on Interstate 84 at high speeds before forcing the vehicle off the road, arresting and subduing the driver with a stun gun.

According to Boardman Police chief Rock Stokoe, Tamar Drake, 39, of Hermiston, was arrested on charges of attempting to elude a police officer, DUI, driving while revoked and on a Grant County warrant. The chase started after 5:30 p.m., when police received a call that an intoxicated woman broke down the front door of a home on Wilson Lane outside of Boardman. The caller said that the woman had a stun gun in her hand when she drove away in a white SUV and smashed a gate while heading toward Love's Travel Stop.

Sgt. Mark Pratt of the Boardman Police Department found Drake behind the wheel, traveling westbound on Wilson Road. Sgt. Pratt attempted to stop the vehicle near Toms Camp Road but the driver failed to yield and eventually got on Interstate 84 and headed eastbound in an erratic

manner. Spike strips were deployed by an Oregon State Police Trooper near the Umatilla County line at milepost 177, which disabled the passenger side tires on the vehicle.

The vehicle continued onto Interstate 82 before taking the Lamb Road exit. Based on the driver's erratic driving, behavior and the fact she was heading toward populated Hermiston, officers decided to utilize the pursuit intervention technique to force the vehicle off the road, Stokoe said in a statement. After a successful maneuver, Drake's car became disabled on the north side of Lamb Road.

While officers from Boardman Police Department, Morrow County Sheriff's Office and Oregon State Police attempted to take Drake into custody, Stokoe said she reached for a knife. A stun gun was deployed by officers, subduing the suspect and allowing officers to take her into custody.

Drake refused all medical treatment and was released from Good Shepherd Hospital. She was transported and lodged at the Umatilla County Jail.

## BRIEFLY

### Running Hot and Walking Cold benefits those in need

HERMISTON — The Umatilla County Peer Support Network, in conjunction with Lifeways Inc. and Community Partners in Umatilla County, is heading up the Running Hot and Walking Cold 5K/10K run/walk.

In its third year, the event is Saturday, June 17 from 9 a.m. to noon at Riverfront Park and Oxbow Trail, Hermiston. Registration begins at 8 a.m. There is no set fee to participate, but participants are asked to make a donation of supplies for the Hermiston Warming & Cooling Station and Desert Rose Ministries.

Suggested items include cases of water, packaged cookies/crackers, laundry detergent, pre-packaged bleach, oatmeal, disinfectant wipes, paper products, creamer/sugar packets, fruit/soup cups, hand sanitizer, hand soap, playing cards, games, books, non-latex gloves, coloring books, crayons, flashlights, batteries, socks and DVDs.

Donations can be brought the day of the event or can be dropped off at the Hermiston Peer Center at 1195 N. First Place, Hermiston. In addition, for donation pickup, call 541-567-2536 extension 720.

For more information, visit [www.evenbrite.com](http://www.evenbrite.com) and search "Running Hot and Walking Cold."

### Fundraiser features farm-fresh dinner

MILTON-FREEWATER — A fresh from the farm dinner and a night of dancing with live music is featured during a fundraiser for the Frazier Farmstead Museum.

The 21-and-older event is Saturday, June 24 from 6-10 p.m. in front of the 1918 barn on the picturesque grounds of the museum, 1403 Chestnut St., Milton-Freewater. Tickets are \$40 each and includes a meal from Simply Catering. Each year, the museum raises more than 15 percent of the annual operating budget during the event.

Frazier Farmstead Museum is a six-acre site listed on the National Register of Historic Places. It was settled in 1868 by community founder W.S. Frazier and continuously occupied by his family for 115 years. It is Milton-Freewater's only museum and is dedicated to preserving the history of the area.

For more information, contact 541-938-4636, [frazier1868@gmail.com](mailto:frazier1868@gmail.com) or visit [www.frazierfarmsteadmuseum.org](http://www.frazierfarmsteadmuseum.org).

## FIRES: Unhooked, moved van the RV was towing

Continued from 1A

the cab and move it to safety, and the state hazardous materials team from Hermiston responded. Ciraulo said Pendleton consulted with the Oregon Department of Environmental Quality and the federal Environmental Protection Agency, which advised against putting too much water on the fire because of a drainage ditch nearby.

Ciraulo also made a call to Umatilla County Emergency Manager Tom Roberts to bring out the county's emergency drone. Ciraulo said the remote-operated flyer allowed a good look into the trailer without the risk of putting someone in danger.

Someday, he said, drones will be common tools for fighting fires.

The Oregon Department of Transportation temporarily closed the westbound lanes near the semi and routed traffic though Pendleton, then closed the freeway to semi traffic as far east as Baker City as truckers piled up in Pendleton and La Grande. The westbound lanes started moving again around 1 p.m.

The backed-up traffic prompted Larry Rosenthal of Phoenix, Arizona, to get off I-84 around 10:30 a.m. and drive his motor home through Pendleton. He said he was headed to Tacoma, Washington, for an annual pinball machine convention with his small service dog, Mia.

As he was driving through town, Rosenthal's 2005 Fleetwood Revolution caught fire and burned up on westbound Southwest Court Avenue in front of the Pendleton Round-Up Grounds.

"I heard like an explosion," he said. "And I didn't realize it was me."

Allison Birdsall said she and her daughter were nearby when it happened.

Birdsall said they stopped on their return to Alaska to take photos in front of the Round-Up's large bronze bucking horse statue at the corner of Court and 12th Street when the motor home exploded. The force, she said, lifted the rear of the vehicle off the road.

Insulation from under the recreational vehicle covered the intersection.

School bus driver Matthew Male Jr., 22, said he was traveling to Pilot Rock with his friend,



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

A Pendleton Police officer directs traffic off Court Avenue and up Southwest 10th Street around an RV fire Thursday in Pendleton. The heavy traffic load was due to westbound Interstate 84 traffic being diverted through town after a fire involving hazardous materials closed the freeway earlier in the day.



Staff photo by Phil Wright

A semitrailer fire Thursday morning shut down the westbound lane of Interstate 84 near milepost 207 in Pendleton. The hazmat unit from Hermiston also responded.

Jackson Lavadour, 19, when they drove by the motor home. They said it was smoking, and they heard a second explosion. The two young Pendleton men said they have firefighting backgrounds, and Male yelled at the motor home's driver to pull over.

Lavadour parked his rig in front of the burning RV, and he and Male hustled out to help. Birdsall also ran to the motor home. She said the vehicle's smoke alarms were screaming, but Rosenthal didn't seem to hear them.

Male said he knew all the smoke meant something had to be on fire, and moments later Rosenthal got out with the dog. The men unhooked the van Rosenthal was towing on the rear of the RV, and Lavadour parked it about half a block away at the entrance to Roy Raley Park.

Saving the van, Rosenthal said, was crucial because it contained about \$80,000 in

pinball materials. Pendleton Police Chief Stuart Roberts, who directed traffic for a while at Southwest Dorion and Eighth Street, later moved and secured the van.

Rosenthal said he smelled something burning and was sure the RV's brake pads overheated on the steep descent down Cabbage Hill, the notorious switchback on the slope of the Blue Mountains several miles east of Pendleton.

Two 16-year-olds in the park said they also heard the explosion. Lynn Bowman and Devon Dumont said drivers kept going past the burning Fleetwood and they were worried traffic would block emergency vehicles. The pair said they started motioning motorists to turn

south onto 12th Street.

Fire Chief Ciraulo said on-duty firefighters were still dealing with the interstate truck fire when the emergency call went out for the motor home.

"Thank God we had everyone recalled back (who) took care of that second fire," he said.

Firefighters drenched the motor home with water and foam. Even so, the blaze burned the rear wheels right off.

Staff at the Round-Up office gave Rosenthal water and a set of fresh clothes. He tried to explain his situation over the phone to an insurance agent, but having left his wallet and phone in the RV did not help.

"Not exactly one of my best days," he told Pendleton fire Capt. John Richardson and officer Mark Golter between bouts on the phone. Still, Rosenthal said, it could have been worse.

Mia kept a playful attitude in the office space, even finding a wooden doorstep for a toy.

And at least the emergencies hit hours before the afternoon thunderstorm that pummeled the region, which Ciraulo said did not spark any fires in Pendleton.

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