



PENDLETON
CLINCHES
LEAGUE TITLE
SOFTBALL/1B



CINCO
DE MAYO
WEEKEND
REGION/3A

EAST OREGONIAN

WEDNESDAY, MAY 2, 2018

142nd Year, No. 139 WINNER OF THE 2017 ONPA GENERAL EXCELLENCE AWARD One dollar

PENDLETON



A U.S. Army AH-64 attack helicopter makes an approach to land at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport on Tuesday in Pendleton.

Airport will pay down debt with general fund

City also expecting \$100,000 from marijuana taxes to be used to repair roads

By **ANTONIO SIERRA**
East Oregonian

The Pendleton airport has accrued more than \$2.5 million in debt over the past few decades, and although relief is on the horizon, it's not coming from passenger flights or unmanned aerial systems.

At a budget committee meeting Tuesday for the 2018-2019 budget, City Manager Robb Corbett said the city will pay \$200,000 toward the debt from the general fund, which is funded through property tax revenue and city fees.

Finance Director Linda Carter told the committee that the city needs to act soon to remain in good financial standing with the city's auditors.

The city's auditing firm, Dickey & Tremper, has warned the city about the airport's heavy debt load for several years.

If the city doesn't start paying back the debt from the interfund loans soon, Carter said the auditors could issue the city a "material weakness" in a future audit, a



Passengers disembark the afternoon flight of Boutique Airlines on Tuesday at the Eastern Oregon Regional Airport in Pendleton.

negative designation that would affect some of the city's grant revenue.

While the longterm goal of the airport remains using revenue from the Pendleton UAS Range to pay off the balance of the

loan, the airport's current revenues aren't enough to take on that responsibility, Corbett said in an interview after the meeting.

See **AIRPORT/8A**

"It's going to be a while before we are going to pull money out of the airport by the wheelbarrow."

— **Robb Corbett**, City Manager

Wheatridge wind farm seeks bigger turbine blades

By **PHIL WRIGHT**
East Oregonian

NextEra Energy Resources wants taller blades on turbines at its Wheatridge Wind Energy Facility sites in Umatilla and Morrow counties.

NextEra, based in Florida, bought the development rights for the 292-turbine wind farm in June 2017. The project would produce a maximum of 500 megawatts of power on almost 13,100 acres separated into two sites — the west turbine group about 7 miles northwest of Heppner and the east turbine group which spans the border of Morrow and Umatilla counties.

NextEra in early April told the Oregon Department of Energy it wants to use larger blades on its turbines. Company spokesperson Steve Stengel said the blades would boost the height of the turbines from 476 feet to a maximum of 500 feet. The larger blades increase the ability to capture the wind, he said, and thus mean greater efficiency.

The company also wants to build a 20 megawatt battery storage site at Wheatridge East and a 30 megawatt battery storage site at Wheatridge West. Stengel said the storage units would fit into the project's existing footprint. NextEra in the April 6 letter stated the structures would have a neutral-colored finish to blend into the surroundings.

Overall, NextEra asserted in the letter, the changes are not significant, and thus asked the energy department to conduct a "Type B review" of recommended changes to the site certificate. That review process is faster and does not include a public hearing.

The energy department replied April 25 and stated it "considers the proposed modifications to be complex" and thus warrant the longer, more stringent Type A review that includes a public hearing.

The battery storage systems are new components, the reply continued, which the department's Energy Facility Siting Council has not evaluated. The state also noted NextEra did not provide information about potential adverse effects from the storage systems, "particularly related to impacts and fire safety risk."

The ball now is in NextEra's court. Stengel said the company will continue to work with the Department of Energy and provide the information it requests.

Construction of Wheatridge has yet to begin. NextEra has until May 2020 to break ground and then three years to finish. Stengel said the longer review process means a greater cost to the company but should not push back construction.

Umatilla County in 2015 opposed the wind farm because Wheatridge Wind Energy's preliminary application to the Oregon Department of Energy and the Energy Facility Siting Council did not address where it would install transmission lines. The county paid \$22,608 to Kellington Law Group of Lake Oswego to review the case and defend the county's position of including the installation.

County counsel Doug Olsen and the county's former planning director, Tamra Mabbott, suggested the county seek the outside advice.

See **WHEATRIDGE/8A**



Staff photo by E.J. Harris

Mooove it along

Cattle watch as a bicyclist rides past on one of the bike trails Tuesday at the Pendleton Adventure Trails Recreation Area. The recreation area doubles as pasture land for cattle.

Voters can comment on gun initiative titles until May 15

By **CLAIRE WITHYCOMBE**
Capital Bureau

PORTLAND — Registered voters have time to submit comments on the "legal sufficiency" of draft ballot titles released by Oregon Attorney General Ellen Rosenblum for two gun-related citizen initiative petitions that could be on the ballot in November.

Voters have until May 8 to comment on a proposed ballot title for a measure that would criminalize the transfer and possession of certain firearms — intended to restrict "assault-style" weapons and high-capacity magazines — in Oregon.

And they have until May 15 to

comment on another ballot measure that would impose new requirements on firearm storage.

Comments must be made in writing before 5 p.m. on the day of the comment deadline to the Elections Division of the Oregon Secretary of State's Office.

Initiative Petition 44 would require that firearms to be secured with a trigger or cable lock engaged, or in a locked container equipped with a tamper-resistant lock. The draft ballot title for the initiative petition was released Tuesday.

It would also require anybody who "owns, possesses or controls" a firearm to report the gun as stolen or lost within

See **VOTERS/8A**

