

Company applies to build massive solar, wind project on farmland

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

RICHLAND, Wash. — A state council next week will have public hearings on plans to build solar panels and erect wind turbines on thousands of acres of farmland in Benton County in South-Central Washington.

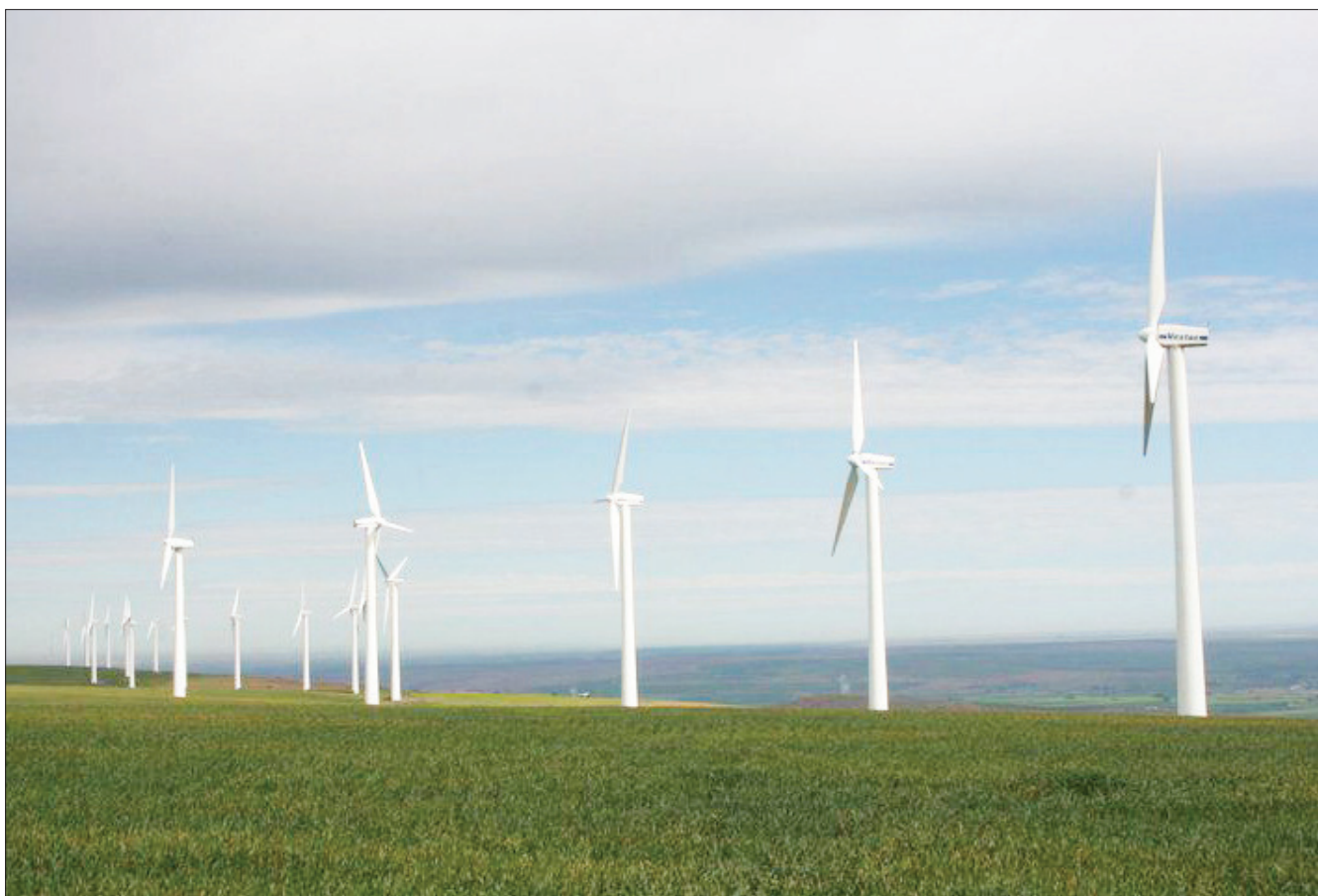
Scout Clean Energy of Boulder, Colorado, would lease 72,295 acres. While 6,860 acres would be “permanently impacted,” the rest could remain in agricultural production, according to the company’s application to the Washington Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council.

The project has encountered opposition. Two county commissioners have said they oppose it. Up to 244 wind turbines would be visible in the Tri-Cities, as well as neighboring Franklin and Walla Walla counties and Oregon.

Wheat farmer Chris Wiley, one of 69 landowners who have signed lease agreements, said the stable annual income will help farmers keep farming.

“This is definitely a way to keep family farms in the family for generations,” he said.

“As far as taking farmland out of production, it’s pretty negligible,” Wiley said. “We’ve weighed the pros and



Capital Press, File

Wind turbines line a ridge in a wheat field north of Helix. A Colorado company proposes to put up to 244 turbines on farmland to the north in Benton County, Wash.

cons, and we’ve decided we’re in favor of it.”

Scout Energy, owned by private investment firm Quinbrook Infrastructure Partners, has been putting together the parcels for several years.

Rather than seek approval from a county hearings exam-

iner, the company last month opted to apply to the state council, an unelected board of public employees that makes recommendations to Gov. Jay Inslee.

In its application, Scout Energy said the wind and solar project will help the state

have carbon-neutral electricity by 2030, a signature goal of Inslee’s climate-change agenda.

Rep. Brad Klippert, R-Kennewick, said Monday, March 22, he opposes the project, saying wind turbines have marred Central Washington’s

landscape. He called handing over the decision to Inslee “tragic.”

“When so many of my constituents say they oppose something, I listen,” he said. “Now it’s a decision that will be shoved down the local area’s throat.”

Though called Horse Heaven Wind Farm, the project may generate more solar power than wind power. The turbines and panels could generate up to 1,150 megawatts, according to the company. The state’s only nuclear power plant generates 1,207 megawatts.

On average, the project would provide enough electricity for 275,000 houses, according to the company, and cattle and sheep could graze near the turbines and up to the fences around the solar panels.

“We call it a drought-proof crop,” Scout Energy community outreach manager Javon Smith said. “Wind farms coexist well with farmland.”

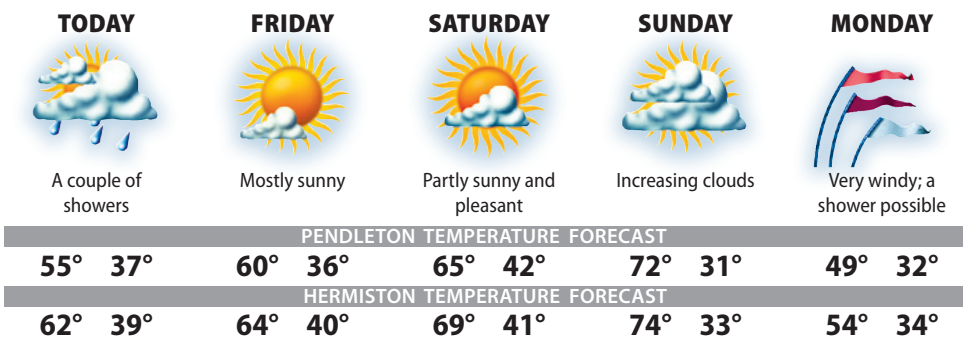
The energy council will hold via Skype two public hearings back-to-back on Tuesday, March 30.

The first hearing will be 5:30 to 7:30 p.m. and include presentations about the project and a chance for the public to comment.

The second hearing will be 7:30 to 9 p.m. on whether the solar and wind farm is consistent with local land-use laws. The land is designated for agriculture, but officials can approve other uses.

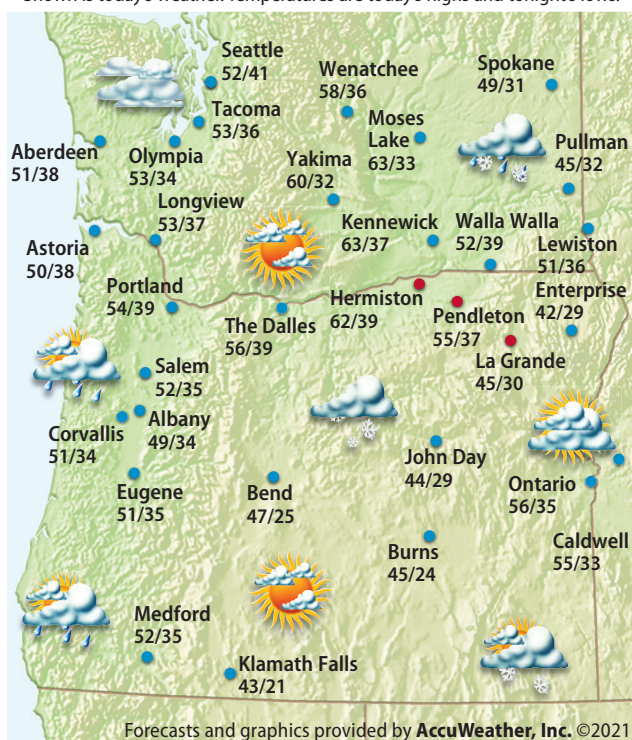
More information on signing up to testify and watching the hearings is available at efsec.wa.gov. Written comments may be emailed to efsec@utc.wa.gov.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

Shown is today's weather. Temperatures are today's highs and tonight's lows.



ALMANAC

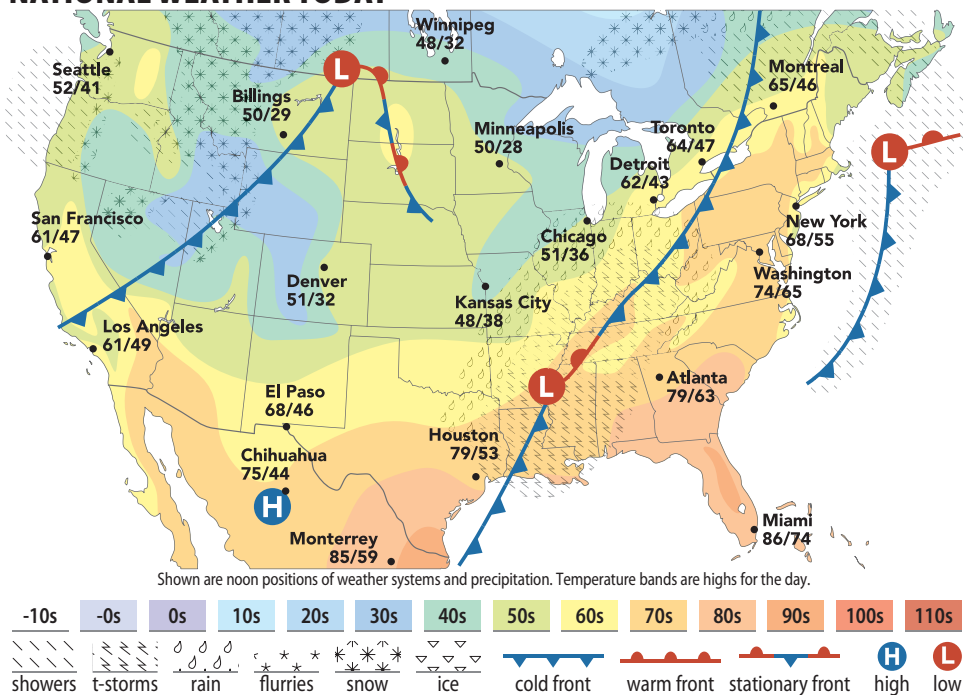
PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	52°	34°
Normals	57°	37°
Records	76° (1939)	18° (1965)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace	
Month to date	0.26"	
Normal month to date	1.07"	
Year to date	3.28"	
Last year to date	4.67"	
Normal year to date	3.58"	
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.		
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW
Yesterday	55°	42°
Normals	60°	36°
Records	80° (1939)	13° (1965)
PRECIPITATION		
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	Trace	
Month to date	0.09"	
Normal month to date	0.71"	
Year to date	1.17"	
Last year to date	0.48"	
Normal year to date	2.95"	
WINDS (in mph)		
	Today	Fri.
Boardman	WSW 6-12	SW 8-16
Pendleton	W 7-14	WSW 7-14
SUN AND MOON		
Sunrise today	6:49 a.m.	
Sunset tonight	7:14 p.m.	
Moonrise today	3:34 p.m.	
Moonset today	5:45 a.m.	
	Full	Last
	New	First
	Mar 28	Apr 4
	Apr 11	Apr 19

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)

High 97° in Zapata, Texas Low -9° in Yellowstone N.P., Wyo.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Oregon relaxes school safety guidelines

By **TERESA CARSON**
Oregon Capital Bureau

SALEM — In yet another about face, the state announced Monday, March 22, that it would drastically reduce the amount of spacing required for students going back to school, to align with new guidance from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

Oregon schools are now allowed, on a voluntary basis, to provide 3 feet of physical distancing between students “under certain conditions.”

Just a week ago, on Monday, March 15, the state announced the safety rules for reopening would be relaxed, but left the 6 feet of spacing requirement unchanged.

School districts have been struggling with planning for returning students to schools amid rapidly changing mandates and guidelines from the state. Some have struck deals with staff unions based on earlier guidelines and would have to reopen

union negotiations if the district wants to reduce the spacing requirement.

The 6 feet of distance and 35 square feet per person that had been required meant that only about half of a student body could fit in a school at once when they reopened. Schools announced arrangements for students to be in buildings in shifts in a model called hybrid education. Students would continue remote learning when they were not in school buildings.

But the Oregon Department of Education said the new distancing guidelines announced March 22 are voluntary.

“This new physical distancing allowance is a local decision. Schools may maintain 6 feet and, under certain conditions, must maintain 6 feet — such as when students from different classrooms are passing in hallways between periods, or when students are eating,” the announcement reads.

Other pandemic safety precautions, such as wearing

masks, were not changed.

The state’s largest district, Portland Public Schools, will maintain 6 feet of distancing as they reopen after spring break, said district spokeswoman Karen Werstein. The district struck a deal with the teacher’s union based on that figure and reducing it would require another round of negotiations.

The ODE announcement reads, “These changes may take place over the next several weeks in some of our schools as every school district will need time to plan and adjust to these new requirements.”

Indirectly acknowledging the fast pace of changes districts have been facing, state Education Department Director Colt Gill said, “This shift will take time to digest, partner with staff, and integrate in many schools and districts. I know our educators have spent countless hours over the last year stretching to implement different learning models and safety protocols.”

IN BRIEF

Oregon governor announces 10-Point Economic Recovery Plan

PORTLAND — Oregon Gov. Kate Brown announced a 10-Point Economic Recovery Plan on Tuesday, March 23, that aims to help families and businesses across the state — with a focus on people of color — impacted financially by the pandemic and 2020 wildfires.

In addition, Brown said the state is slated to receive \$6.4 billion in funds from the recently passed COVID-19 stimulus package, which she said should be invested in a way that “maximizes economic recovery efforts for Oregonians this year, while also addressing the existing disparities that were exacerbated by the pandemic.”

Oregon had among the strictest COVID-19 restrictions and safety measures in the United

States, with the state shutting down in March 2020 and businesses — restaurants, gyms and indoor entertainment venues — again forced to close their doors in November 2020 for weeks and in some counties months.

Since the start of the pandemic, Oregon has paid around \$8 billion in jobless benefits. Between March and July 2020 alone, more than 500,000 people filed unemployment claims in the state, causing major delays in people receiving funds.

In the midst of the pandemic, Oregon faced another devastating challenge — wildfires.

During the wildfires that burned more than 1 million acres, at least 4,000 homes were destroyed and some people are still displaced.

“My 10-Point Plan provides a roadmap for economic recovery, and will guide our state and local governments as we invest our shares of federal dollars from the American Rescue Plan,” Brown said.

— Associated Press

CORRECTIONS: The *East Oregonian* works hard to be accurate and sincerely regrets any errors. If you notice a mistake in the paper, please call 541-966-0818.

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