

OTEC to build solar farm in La Grande

By ANDREW CUTLER
The Observer



Joseph Hathaway/Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative

This field along U.S. Highway 30 outside La Grande will be home to Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative's 500-panel community solar project. The project is slated to be built and operational this fall.

LA GRANDE — Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative's already mostly carbon-free power supply is about to get a little greener.

The Baker City-based cooperative will begin work this fall on a 500-panel community solar project near the cooperative's Gekeler Lane substation outside La Grande. Construction on the project is expected to take just one month to complete and put into service, according to the cooperative, which serves about 23,000 customers in four Eastern Oregon counties.

"Our highest priority is to serve our membership so we put together this project," Charlie Tracy, the cooperative's director of engineering, said. "It's on property here in Union County. It's in La Grande. So we're excited about it. That's also the district where we've seen the most interest, so we're excited to be able to have it be local and have a member be able to drive by the place that they know that their power is coming from."

This is the utility's first solar project.

"You can't really say you're an expert in solar farms until you build one,

right? So a big part of it is to gain expertise and become experts in the changing landscape," Tracy said. "In another year, we'll really know quite a lot about it and I feel like we do now, but this is part of that learning process."

Oregon Trail members will have the option of helping finance the project by buying subscriptions. When the solar project begins generating clean energy, members will start receiving a credit on their utility bill for their portion of the electricity generated.

"We meter it just like we would a house or a load, and then we divide the output, so

MORE INFORMATION

For more information on the Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative's solar farm, visit the cooperative's website at otec.coop.

the energy that's generated within a given month, we divide it up into portions," Tracy said. "Those portions are sold to a member as a subscription. So essentially, they pre-purchase the output of the array and that output is then applied to their bill to subtract off, essentially, their usage."

Subscriptions, which are on a first-come, first-served basis, will cost \$250 per share

and are available to anyone living or doing business in the OTEC service territory, which includes Baker, Union, Grant and Harney counties.

"We broke it up into what we think are affordable, small portions because that's one of the things we've heard from members is roof-top solar has an extremely high upfront cost," Tracy said. "What the community solar project brings to people is the ability

to buy into it at smaller increments — \$250 per portion."

The 500 panels will generate approximately 200 kilowatts of electricity that will be distributed along OTEC's system.

"We're hoping that if shares sell quickly that we can expand it," Tracy said. "Ultimately, we'd like to have one in each of our service territories."

The subscription will be good for 20 years and can be moved around within the cooperative's service territory or can be gifted to someone.

"Let's say you move out of territory, you can gift it

to your friend, neighbor or kids," Joseph Hathaway, the cooperative's communications manager, said. "That share will still continue up until 20 years."

Tracy said members will see no increase in their monthly bill to pay for the cost of the solar farm, the costs are covered by the members who purchase subscriptions.

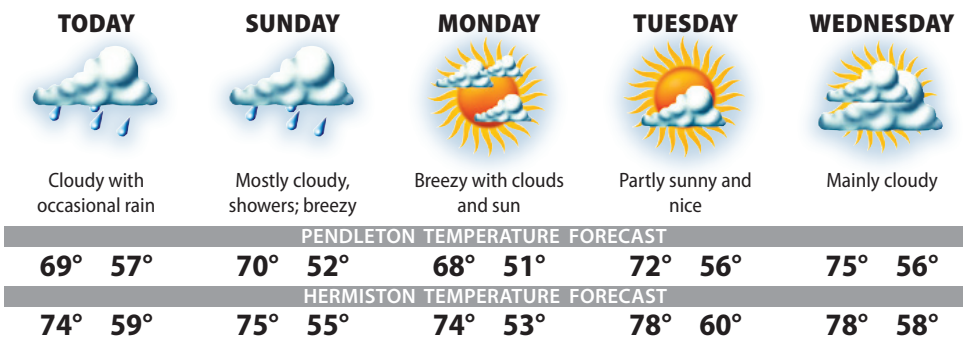
More than 94% of the power Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative receives from Bonneville Power Administration is carbon-free, with about 85% of it being from hydroelectric.

"We've got a phenomenal, enviable power supply, as good or better than anywhere in the world in terms of its low environmental impact and climate change carbon impact," Tracy said. "So we feel really good about that and really positive about it. But beyond that, we're working on this project to supply an even more local and even more renewable power supply that a lot of our members have asked for."

Hathaway said the solar project came from some of the surveying the cooperative has done over the years.

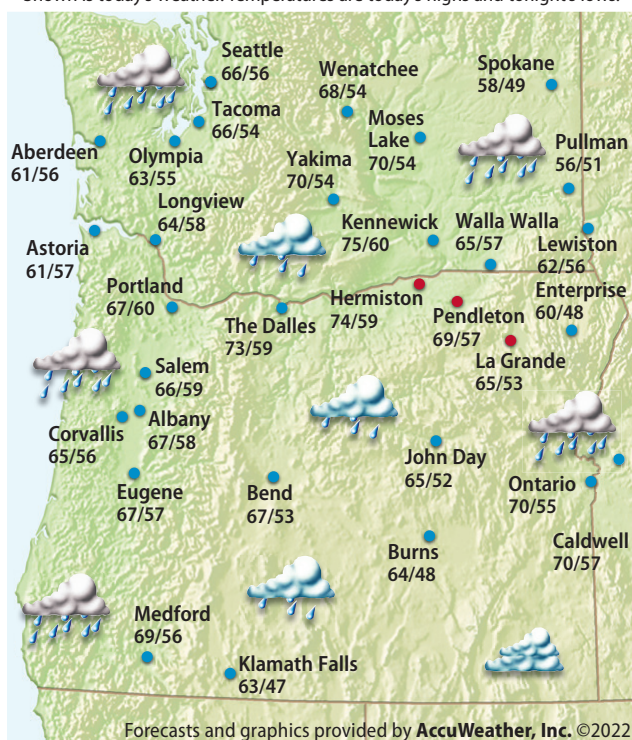
"I think the last survey we saw, it was around 20% said that they would like to have that solar option," he said.

Forecast for Pendleton Area



OREGON FORECAST

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



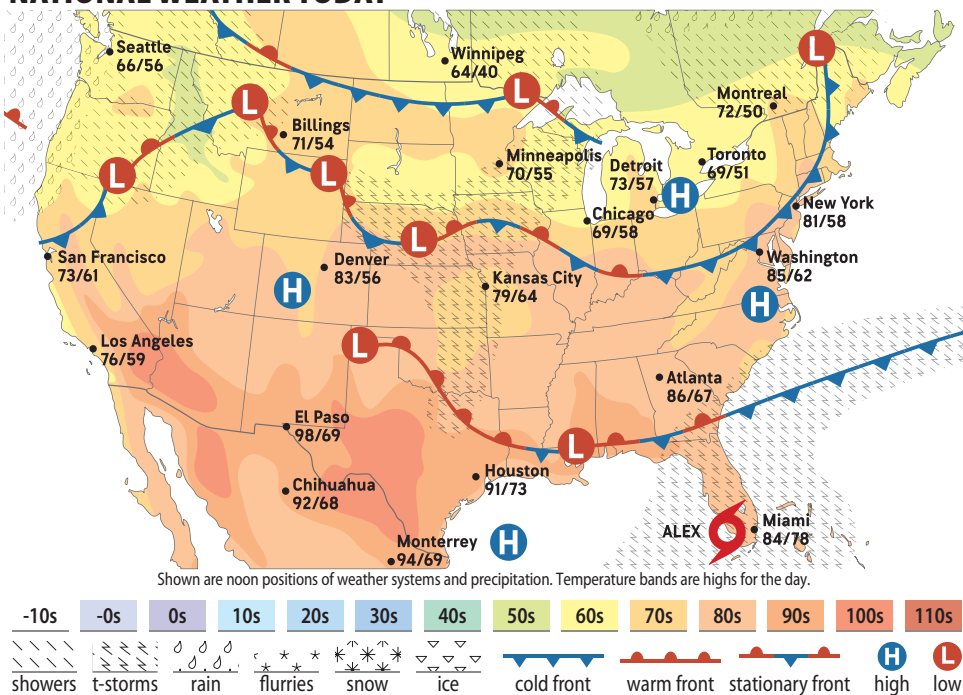
ALMANAC

PENDLETON through 3 p.m. yest.				
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW		
Yesterday	71°	56°		
Normals	76°	50°		
Records	98° (2007)	34° (1918)		
PRECIPITATION				
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.65"			
Month to date	0.65"			
Normal month to date	0.17"			
Year to date	9.31"			
Last year to date	4.02"			
Normal year to date	7.01"			
HERMISTON through 3 p.m. yest.				
TEMP.	HIGH	LOW		
Yesterday	73°	55°		
Normals	79°	51°		
Records	99° (2007)	34° (1929)		
PRECIPITATION				
24 hours ending 3 p.m.	0.31"			
Month to date	0.32"			
Normal month to date	0.09"			
Year to date	6.11"			
Last year to date	2.23"			
Normal year to date	4.47"			
WINDS (in mph)				
	Today	Sun.		
Boardman	SSW 6-12	WSW 10-20		
Pendleton	S 6-12	WSW 10-20		
SUN AND MOON				
Sunrise today	5:08 a.m.			
Sunset tonight	8:40 p.m.			
Moonrise today	9:22 a.m.			
Moonset today	12:30 a.m.			
	First	Full	Last	New
	June 7	June 14	June 20	June 28

NATIONAL EXTREMES

Yesterday's National Extremes: (for the 48 contiguous states)
High 102° in El Centro, Calif. Low 27° in Bodie State Park, Calif.

NATIONAL WEATHER TODAY



Flora School Days 'Back in the Saddle Again' Saturday

Wallowa County Chieftain

FLORA — The historic Flora School is "Back in the Saddle Again" this year, after taking time off for the pandemic. The school will be open for its traditional School Days from 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday, June 4.

Visitors are urged to come, see, learn and live in the past including dressing in an "Old West" style, according to a press release.

Part of living in the past begins early, as the forge will be fired up and ready for the third-annual blacksmith contest at 8 a.m.

Demonstrations of pioneer skills generally start at 10 a.m. and continue until

3 or 4 p.m. Some skills and activities scheduled include grafting heirloom apple trees, story time, town tours with draft mules, cleaning cast iron after lunch and sewing bean bags to name a few.

One of the highlights of the day is the Camp Chili Cookoff. Contestants should be signed up, pay a \$5 fee and be ready to cook at 11 a.m. They must be done by 2 p.m. For \$1, visitors taste-test each chili in order to decide the winner of the contest. Contestants may only have the beans cooked prior to the start. For more information about the cookoff, call or text Shannon Wiedeman at 541-263-0132.

Dutch oven implements are the focus of this year's

blacksmith contest. The tools will be auctioned off at the end of the day along with presentation of winners. Dick Phillips, a Walla Walla, Washington, blacksmith from days gone by, will judge this year's competition. All metals are provided. For more information, call or text Nathan Thompson at 509-876-7812.

The event is part of an ongoing effort to raise money to restore the school building to its 1915 glory.

For more information, refer to Flora School's website, www.floraschool.org, Facebook page, Instagram, YouTube channel, email floraschool@tds.net or call 541-828-7010.

IN BRIEF

Fire destroys Jeep, but doesn't spread to forest

BAKER CITY — A Jeep Cherokee was destroyed in a fire, but no one was hurt and the flames didn't spread into the nearby forest on Saturday, May 28 on the Marble Creek Pass road about 9 miles west of Baker City.

The fire happened a little before 8 a.m. Baker County Sheriff Travis Ash, who responded to the 911 call from the Jeep's owner, Pat Thomas, said Thomas was alone in the vehicle.

Ash said Thomas, who was planning to go for a mountain bike ride, noticed smoke coming from the engine compartment of the early 1990s vehicle.

Thomas parked in a turnout beside Marble Creek, about a mile before the road leading to the picnic area.

Flames had melted the hood latch, Ash said. The cause of the fire isn't known, he said.

Thomas called 911 at 7:54 a.m., according to the Baker County Dispatch Center.

Ash said that when he arrived the Jeep was "fully engulfed" in flames, and it wasn't possible to douse the fire with a handheld extinguisher.

Sean Lee, chief of the Baker Rural Fire District, arrived with a tanker truck and was



Baker County Sheriff's Office/Contributed Photo

A fire that started in the engine compartment destroyed a Jeep Cherokee along Marble Creek Pass road on May 28, 2022. The driver, who was alone in the vehicle, was not hurt.

able to control the fire, Ash said. Ash said it was fortunate that the fire happened now, after a period of cool, rainy weather, rather than later in the summer, when the flames might have spread into the forest. "We're lucky it's early in the season, and it was really wet out there," he said.

—EO Media Group

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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