Filters:

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Uskoski said this particular installation was simple. Many of these installations are easy, he added, and they are within the ability of DIY-inclined homeowners. However, this is not the case for every situation, he said.

"Everyone is a little different," he said.

Installation could, he said, become complicated at some homes. And some people, he added, might lack the ability or knowledge to perform any installation at all, even the "easy" ones.

He said the filtration systems will need maintenance, including a change of filters between one and three years, depending on the level of nitrates in filtered water.

According to Doherty, this first installation was necessary, though many other homes might be in even greater need.

"Sad to say, this one was one of the low ones, at 28 (parts per million)," he said of Kurtz's home.

He added different agencies have varying levels of acceptability. Some groups, he said, take issue with water that has nitrate levels over 5 ppm. The new filtration units, Doherty said, make water safe to drink; water processed through them has a negligible nitrate level in most cases.

"If you get some of those extremes that we're getting, like a 68 or 70, the filters do a great job, but the higher you get, the harder it is to pull down," he said.

He added the systems still can reduce nitrates to drinkable levels, but filters require more frequent changing — maybe once every three months, rather than every year or more.

Doherty said these filters in the future may be adjusted so they can protect from other contaminants, including arsenic, lead and coliform bacteria. For now, however, such work is outside the county's scope.

"That's outside of our emergency, which is a nitrate emergency," he said. "In the short term, we just want to get something that will pull these nitrates out."

He added it is a "great idea" for homeowners to test their wells for other contaminants.

Nitrate problems started years before

Kurtz said she had mostly avoided drinking her well water, as she preferred the taste of bottled water and flavored drinks. That said, she has consumed a fair amount of well water, she said; Kurtz cooked with it, used it for making coffee and even swallowed it in her shower.

"It looked like water," she said.

It didn't look as though it was unsafe to drink, she said, as it was clear. Kurtz said that she felt especially protected by heating it, but she now knows that boiling the water doesn't remove nitrates.

For decades, she drank the water and believed she was not in great danger, she said.

In 1978, according to Kurtz, she moved into her home. At the time, she tested the water. She said she was told that she would be fine drinking the water if she used a water softener. Kurtz added that only recently she learned that a water softener alone would not make her water safe.

She said she doesn't blame contaminated water for all of her health woes. Still, she added, it may have contributed to some of her problems.

Nitrate consumption has been linked to ill health in people with low immunity, including children, pregnant women and individuals who are already sick.

Pineyro showed up at her home one day recently and asked to test the water. Kurtz welcomed her to do that. Pineyro said she was going door to door, and her visit to Kurtz was just one of many.

Kurtz said she is happy for receiving the filter, and she doesn't blame any person or industry for actions they may have taken to put nitrates in her water. Many of the responsible people, she said, are long gone, and they were probably acting with the best knowledge they had at the time. No one, she said, could've known that they would have harmed her or anyone else, she said.

Standing at Kurtz's bedside, Doherty said he agreed with her assessment. He added that companies doing business in the area now are operating with better practices, and they, too, are concerned about the well-being of local people.

"Twenty-five or 30 years ago, when this desert was blossoming, folks just went out every year and put on 200 or 300 pounds of nitrogen. It's just what they did. Now, they've got precision measuring and dispensing of fertilizers," he said. "I think they're using best practices."

Doherty said he favors action that keeps businesses open, while also improving their techniques.

Another Boardman homeowner, Gary Klinger, said he received a water filtration unit, too. According to Klinger, however, he was responding to a much lower nitrate level than Kurtz. He said county officials tested his water and found his nitrate level to be 5 ppm.

For years, he said, he has used the water for cooking and drinking, but he "didn't think anything about it." He thought it was safe.

After hearing about local concerns about nitrates, he said, he looked further into it. According to Klinger, though some agencies would consider his water drinkable, he would rather be safe than sorry, which is why he asked for the filtration system, which was provided free of charge.

His complaint, he said, is that the filter is only for his kitchen. He said he would prefer a system that would remove nitrates from all his water, regardless of where he received it.

"I should be able to drink from my hose and not have to worry about it," he said. "I'm grateful for what I have. Don't get me wrong. I'd just like it to be a little different."

Erick Peterson/East Oregonian

Ana Pineyro, Morrow County communicable disease and emergency preparedness coordinator, and Morrow County Commissioner Jim Doherty look at results from a rapid test of drinking water in a Boardman home on July 14, 2022. Prior to the installation of a water filtration system, water from the kitchen tap had a nitrate level of 28 ppm. After the installation, the nitrate level was nearly undetectable and safe for drinking.

"I SHOULD BE ABLE TO DRINK FROM MY HOSE AND NOT HAVE TO WORRY ABOUT IT."

— Gary Klinger, Boardman homeowner

Berries:

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"There are only two places on earth like this: here and in France. It's good drainage for the berries, and the minerals are good for their flavor."

Terri Deleon and Nelly Ochoa seem to agree. On Friday, July 15, the two friends were plucking away as fast as they could in the U-pick operation, undeterred by an evening sun beating down without mercy.

"It's something fun to do," Deleon said. "I mostly pick for desserts, my blueberry bread and jam."

Ochoa, who would gather more than 8 pounds of juicy goodness, gave a knowing nod. "My blueberry salad," she said. "It's good."

This year, the fruit is $4 a pound at the U-pick price, and most people come to harvest large quantities for freezing, Heather Alarcon said, noting there are about two more weeks to this season.

The business also sells sorted and prepackaged blueberries.

Bluewind Berry Farm grows Duke and Chandler blueberries, chosen for their pollination compatibility.

The Chandler berry is known for its sweet and exceptionally large fruit, according to World Fresh Exports Inc., while the Duke is an early ripening variety and a "favorite among retailers for its sweet flavor, large berry size and firmness."

The varieties take up 2 of the nearly 10 acres owned by the Alarcons.

The hope and plan is to cultivate more. Gabriel Alarcon just ended his trucking business and expects to devote his working hours to the farm operation, he said.

That said, their sons are not necessarily interested in farming the fruit, Heather Alarcon conceded.

"In fact, the oldest one told us from the beginning this was a bad idea. But he's the one out here helping me today."

Sheila Hagar/ Walla Walla Union-Bulletin

The 2022 blueberry crop is bountiful and delicious, Milton-Freewater farmers Heather and Gabriel Alarcon say.

BLUEBERRY BANANA SMOOTHIE

Heather Alarcon, co-farmer at Bluewind Berry Farm, said she whips these up as a variation of the banana milkshakes her mom, Yvonne Oleson, created.

Three cups of milk or milk replacement.
One frozen banana.

"The bananas are the sweetener, so freeze them when they are a little older and sweeter. Peel, chop into 1-inch chunks and freeze in bags," Alarcon said. "You can also just freeze the whole banana and peel before using, but it's a chilly process."

One cup of frozen Bluewind blueberries.

Add milk to blender, cover and turn to a high setting. Add fruit a bit at a time and blend until frothy. Serves three to four.

B2H:

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"In terms of this being a normal number — it's absolutely not," ODOE senior siting analyst Kellen Tardaewether said. "This is the biggest case that the council has ever seen."

Fourteen parties filed those exceptions. Though numbers have changed since 2020, the remaining exceptions were reviewed in the Proposed Contested Change Order. The PCCO was completed May 31, reviews the appeals on the project and offers a solution for them.

The time frame already has passed for any remaining parties to file exceptions against the project, so now Tardaewether and her team can examine the case at hand. The siting analyst said this is one of the "biggest, most complicated" cases she's ever seen.

The council will go over and review the PCCO at its July 22 meeting. Tardaewether said the next meetings will help the council reach its final decision. There is not a scheduled time for any meetings after July 22, but the decision should come in two to four months.

"For those very curious about what will happen, just know we really are working on it," Tardaewether said.

The opposition

Jim Kreider is one of the 37 exceptions noted by Tardaewether and one of the driving forces against the B2H line. He and his wife Fuji Kreider spearhead the Stop B2H Coalition, a group that believes Idaho Power Co. can look into other options rather than put the line through the Eastern Oregon area.

Located outside of La Grande, the Kreiders said they believe they know the area best, claiming Idaho Power has connected the residents of La Grande on this issue.

"It's become a hotbed of resistance," Jim Kreider said.

The group has met with state leaders such as U.S. Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley, discussing different ideas.

One of the main points of contingency is the perceived effect of the climate. The group claims clearing out for the project will destabilize soils and increase the risk for endangered species, all while being louder than safety standards for many households.

These complaints have not subsided for either the Kreiders or their many other partners in the coalition, though others have waned.

"During the period, rulings and motions, it wore people down," Fuji Kreider said. "That's their technique, to wear us down."

Among the swath of complaints, both the Kreiders and the coalition list several other options for the line, including burying it underground and increasing the production of other transmission lines out of state.

The superhighway

Sven Berg is the communications director at Idaho Power. He said the company has dealt with other opposition groups in the past — especially from Eastern Oregon — but they have come to understand each other.

Idaho Power is one of the operators of the B2H and owns 45% of the line. Along with PacifiCorp, the companies hope the line can become a "clean-energy superhighway."

During the winter months, Berg said customers in Portland need more power to handle the peak. Another goal for the company is to increase the nation's Western grid, something increasingly important as both wind and solar power continue to rise.

"We have to build the grid for peak need, not average need." Berg said, "We have to keep homes and businesses at room temperature."

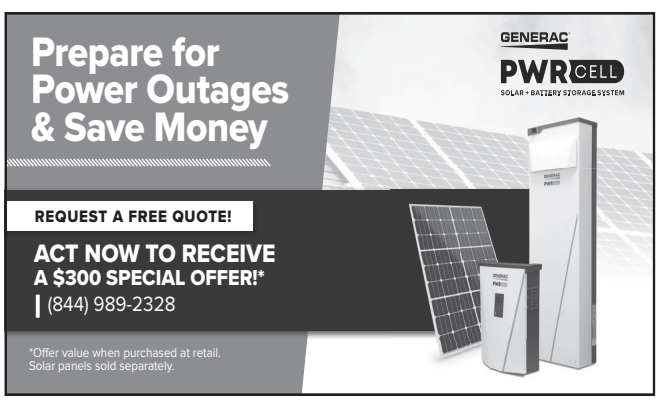
Even with opposition to the project. Idaho Power's goal has not changed since its filing in 2018. In fact, its tenacity towards the project has only gotten stronger.

"The more we study, the more we are convinced that this is the best option for the Pacific Northwest," Berg said.

With a response from the DOE in the coming months, Berg said Idaho Power is sticking to its plan of a 2023 start date. He said he hopes that by October the company will get a building permit across to the Oregon side of the project.

East Oregonian, File

A fence line traces the approximate route of the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line Feb. 2, 2022, along the edge of Richard and Jean Hemphill's family property near Pilot Rock.

HOW TO PARTICIPATE

The Friday, July 22 meeting is from 8 a.m. to 2:30 p.m. The Boardman to Hemingway transmission line is one of many items on the docket for the council, with others ranging from wildlife protection to carbon dioxide emissions.
For those interested in attending the meeting, the event is available online. People who want to participate may address the council during the public comment portion and at other designated agenda points. For more information, visit www.oregon.gov/energy/facilities-safety/facilities/Pages/Council-Meetings.aspx.