

A Sky Trak forklift holds up a tree dislodged by last week's wind storm at The Country Inn motel on West North Street in Enterprise.

Rich Rautenstrauch/  
Chieftain



Rich Rautenstrauch/Chieftain

Highway 82 & Lake Street, Joseph.

# Wind storm downs lines, topples trees

By Rob Ruth  
Wallowa County Chieftain

A strong wind storm that whipped into the valley Thursday night grew especially fierce during Friday's early morning hours, knocking out nearly everyone's electricity, toppling scores of trees, and otherwise dealing damage to many roofs.

From early Friday morning until late that night, Wallowa County Sheriff Steve Rogers and two deputies spent much of their day keeping the public from identified hazards and checking out new reports of wind-related incidents — "from downed power lines to downed trees all day," Rogers said. "Trying to make sure people were OK."

Although trees were felled and roofs were damaged throughout the county, the highest concentration of incidents occurred in and around Joseph, where a power pole, transformer and line went down at the E. Pine/N. Lake intersection; Joseph Charter School suffered broken windows, damaged football bleachers and possibly other damage as well; and the rodeo grounds sustained a more serious blow still.

"The rodeo grounds were damaged pretty significantly," Rogers said. He said the damage affected approximately 100 feet of fence on the back of the grandstands on the arena's north side, and the Hospitality Room, where wind "took all the doors out" of that metal structure.

According to the locally maintained josephoregon-weather.com website, the maximum recorded wind speed in Joseph on Feb. 6 was 62.1 mph at 6:01 a.m., and the maximum gust, at 4:59 a.m., reached 86.3 mph.

As evidence that winds were strong everywhere, though, Rogers cites the damage to roadside signage. "All the highway signs were flattened up Highway 82," he said. "Some snapped off."

Pacific Power spokesman Tom Gauntt roughly estimated the outage affected 4,000 to 5,000 service meters when it was most widespread, sometime between 2 and 3 a.m. At that time, he said, the



Rich Rautenstrauch/Chieftain

This vehicle on Mill Street in Joseph took a direct hit when a tree fell during Friday's wind storm.



Rich Rautenstrauch/Chieftain

The metal fence backing one set of grandstands at the Chief Joseph Days Rodeo Grounds was a casualty of Friday's wind, and the nearby Hospitality Room (not pictured) lost all its doors.

outage encompassed "pretty much every place in the county, except for Imnaha," which receives its electrical feed from Idaho Power facilities.

Pacific Power reported electricity restored to all its local customers around noon on Friday.

On the school athletics front, the wind storm scrubbed a junior high school wrestling tournament that had been scheduled for Friday in Joseph, and caused Joseph and Wallowa high schools to reschedule their Friday night basketball matchup in Joseph to Tuesday, Feb. 10.

Business has of course been brisk for local tree services during the days of cleanup following the storm. Jack Walker, who operates Joseph firm Executive Tree Care with brother Brian Walker, said Monday that calls to the firm to deal with

downed trees had already totaled an estimated 30 to 40, and more were coming in. Jack Walker said it all amounted to "an early jump start" to the company's normal operating season.

He noted that most of the trees that had fallen had previously been topped, which can weaken a tree over time. "The ones that have been topped actually have rot in them," he said.

Marty Hamilton, owner of Tree Care North, also based in Joseph, agreed that topped trees fared poorly in the wind storm, and added a couple of other observations concerning trees that went down Friday.

"One hundred percent of them are headed to the north," Hamilton said, which meant that any susceptible tree that was growing immediately south of a structure or parked car would have fallen on top of that building or vehicle. "Ninety-five percent of our tree failures were evergreens," Hamilton added, "and I'd say at least 90 percent of all of them were spruce trees." He noted that spruces, pines, and firs are "shallow-rooted."

Hamilton said Tree Care

North had been handling about a dozen calls a day connected to the wind storm. "We've been focusing on taking the trees off of houses, fences, and out of people's driveways." The firm encourages people to keep the wood chips produced during the

cleanup for use as dryscape mulch. "We like to see them recycle them back in their environments," Hamilton said.

And chips aren't the storm's only useful byproduct. "There's going to be a lot of firewood out there," Hamilton said.

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