

Telephone pedestals go up in flames

Ditch burning temporarily disrupts service

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Three telephone service pedestals in the rural Enterprise area were burned in just seven days by landowners burning ditches along roadsides, temporarily disrupting service, said a spokesman with Zply Fiber, the company that owns the pedestals.

“This is an uncommon volume for such a short window of time,” said Ryan Luckin, vice president of marketing and communications in an email Thursday, April 15.

The most recent pedestal destroyed was at the intersection of Hurricane Creek Road and Dorrance Lane between Enterprise and Joseph. It was replaced Monday, April 19, by a Zply crew from La Grande.

Luckin said telephone customers were quickly returned to service on a temporary basis. He did not know if cellular towers were affected by the damage and thus, was unsure if cell service was disrupted.

He said it depends on the extent of the damage, but he estimated the cost to replace the pedestal would be between \$1,800 and \$2,000. He said often the responsible landowner is billed for the damage, but that’s evaluated on a case-by-case basis.

“The most important thing is to restore service quickly and keep residents connected to critical means of communication,” Luckin said.

The pedestal is one that provides telephone service to customers in rather remote areas, he said.

Paul Karvoski, emergency services manager for Wallowa County, is apprehensive over the coming potential fire season.

“Get ready for summer,” he told the Enterprise City



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

Zply Fiber worker Mark Ralph, left, watches as Danny Stubblefield operates a backhoe to dig out and replace a telephone service pedestal Monday, April 19, 2021, that was burned April 14 by a landowner burning his ditch at the intersection of Hurricane Creek Road and Dorrance Lane south of Enterprise.



Bill Bradshaw/Wallowa County Chieftain

This telephone service pedestal was damaged Wednesday, April 14, 2021, when a landowner burned the roadside along Hurricane Creek Road at Dorrance Lane. Zply Fiber had to replace the box Monday.

Council in his dual capacity as city fire chief Monday, April 12.

He also told the council of numerous incidents of intentional burns getting out of control over the previous few days, including five from noon to 5 p.m. the previous Friday.

“Friday afternoon was very stressful,” he told the council.

On Thursday, Karvoski said it appears landowners need to be more careful when conducting controlled burns.

“They’re not doing their due diligence to keep it away from the telephone box,” he said.

Karvoski agreed with Luckin that the recent rash of utility destruction was unusual.

“This is the first time it’s been this bad over the years,” he said.

He also said there is an unusual increase in controlled burns in the county.

“I’ve never seen so many fields burned,” he said, noting that it was a positive action to get rid of flammable weeds, but care needs to be taken.

“If you see one of those things in the ditches, you’d better burn around it,” he said.

In the future, Luckin said, landowners conducting burning should be “cautious and aware of surroundings and nearby utilities.”

He said it goes beyond simply damaging his company’s equipment.

“Damages such as this can take customers out of service and cause them to have no capability to contact 911 for emergency services,” he said. “In addition, many utilities are located together and when power is involved, life-threatening injuries can occur when damages such as this happen.”

Community food project takes root with FEAST grant

Effort aims to boost feeding the hungry

By **BILL BRADSHAW**
Wallowa County Chieftain

ENTERPRISE — Supporters of the Wallowa County Food Bank are working to raise an additional \$500 toward a project to help feed and inform the needy about food resources after the receipt of a \$1,075 grant for the effort, according to a press release.

A new project emerged March 16 when more than 25 community members gathered in the online Wallowa County FEAST (Food, Education and Agriculture Solutions Together) event and has received seed funds to launch the project. The FEAST grant will pay about two-thirds of the project, which is expected to cost \$1,575, the release stated.

During the March 16 event, panelists told about opportunities and challenges in local farming, food distribution and food access. Participants also broke into small groups for more in-depth discussion and idea sharing.

A challenge that came up in all four breakout groups was local access to fresh, healthy foods by people on a limited budget. One idea to address this challenge has now grown roots into a new project.

“The challenge of accessing nutritious food on a limited budget has come up in all three FEAST events held since 2012,” said Sara Miller, a FEAST Leadership Team member of the Northeast Oregon Economic Development District.

“It is exciting to see this collaborative project com-

ing together to help all of us know about and be able to share information that can benefit our communities,” said Katy Nesbitt, of St. Patrick’s Episcopal Church, the sponsor of this year’s FEAST event.

The project will share information on food programs/services and transportation services available to people with lower incomes in Wallowa County. Information such as where to apply and who can offer support in the application process, locations of food banks and food box programs, what local establishments accept state and federal benefits such as SNAP and WIC and ways to support local food programs will be included.

The project will work with the many organizations providing resources to gather information and develop a flyer that can be handed out and posted on websites and social media. In addition, an info-mailer will be direct-mailed to every mailbox.

Project organizers hope that sharing the information will ensure many more people know about these essential resources and ways to support them, and that people will also feel empowered to share the information with others.

The Wallowa County Farmers Market will work with partners to raise the remaining \$500 needed to complete the project. The goal is to post online content and distribute 4,525 direct mailers and flyers to homes and partner organizations by June 30.

Anyone who would like to support the project financially or with information can reach out to Sara Averbek, secretary for the farmers market, at averbecksara@gmail.com.

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