



Cherise Kaechele/The (La Grande) Observer

Peter Barry and other members of the Stop B2H coalition placed a 100-foot piece of reflective foil (just below the "A" in "What") on Barry's land to represent the effect new power line towers would have.

B2H foes place foil strip on hill near La Grande to represent towers

By Cherise Kaechele
The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — It's a question likely asked by many in La Grande: "What is that thing on the hillside?"

A local group decided to make a visual representation of what the Boardman to Hemingway transmission line tower will look like. But imagine something twice as big.

Peter Barry is the landowner where the 100-foot foil has been set on the hillside going up to Morgan Lake, which is visible in portions of La Grande.

The mysterious strip of silver glinting in the light has been a topic of conversation, he told The Observer, which is exactly what he and other members of the Stop B2H coalition wanted.

"This is a very small representation," Barry said of the line. "We're trying to remind people there's an impending disaster in our community. This is supposed to represent one tower. But there will be about 15 to 20 transmission line towers approximately 185 feet tall and it's going right through La Grande."

The Boardman to Hemingway line is a proposed 500 kW transmission line that

would extend approximately 300 miles from Boardman, Oregon to the Hemingway Substation in southwestern Idaho.

It is proposed to come through Union and Baker counties, and the specific route is still being discussed. However, one of the proposed routes goes right where that silver strip on the hillside is, which gives those in La Grande a good idea of what they'd be seeing, Barry said. "Some people have noticed and some haven't," he said of the foil on the hill. "There's no way, though, that we can build anything remotely close to (what the towers will look like)."

He said they plan to enlarge the foil from the approximately 100 feet it is now to closer to the actual size of the towers — 185 feet.

"There is a proposal there would be two (transmission line) towers in that (Morgan Lake) vicinity," he said. "Despite the outpouring of opposition against this project, there are still people who haven't heard about B2H."

Barry said members of the Stop B2H coalition brainstormed on how to get people's attention.

"This would be a daily blight in our community," he said. "We thought about getting balloons or renting massive cranes. They were either very expensive or difficult to do. Now, we are going to expand it and add others in other locations."

He said this is all to warn people of this "invasion by a private organization."

Idaho Power, Bonneville Power Association and PacifiCorp say they are building the line, which is now 10 years into its process, to make room for expansion.

"A lot of people don't believe this is going to happen," Barry said. "But it's making its way through the state agencies. It's been getting the rubber stamp from corporate-friendly agencies in Oregon. People have been opposing it for 10 years, but really for three years the coalition has been working to stop it and inform people."

People have been devoting their lives to reading the thousands of pages submitted to all the necessary state agencies that have the "rubber stamp," he said.

"We're really up against it. We're urging the local citizens to call the

(La Grande) city councilors and (Union County) commissioners and tell them this is a travesty and they don't want it."

He added this project isn't needed. However, even if Idaho Power chooses to build it, there's no reason it has to go right through La Grande.

"It should be built two miles away — or 20 miles away," he said. "(La Grande) wouldn't have to see it. There's no reason to put it by La Grande."

Barry said the 100-foot foil gleaming on the hillside is nothing compared to what's to come.

"(The transmission line) is 100 times worse than this," he said. "There's no way (we) could try and replicate it. We want to keep this in the public's eye."

Barry said those who want to make sure B2H doesn't come to La Grande, should contact public officials and voice opposition, or visit the StopB2H coalition's Facebook page or email StopB2H@gmail.com for updates.

"We don't want this thing in our backyard," Barry said. "We like electricity (but) there's a time and place for everything. And this isn't it."

JOBS

Continued from Page 1A

Baker County's August rate is among the highest in Oregon, ranking 29th among the state's 36 counties.

The statewide unemployment rate for the month was a record-low 3.8 percent.

Extremely low unemployment rates can make it difficult for employers to find workers, Rich said.

Businesses new to Baker City have had varying results when trying to hire employees this year.

The Grocery Outlet store slated to open

Oct. 11 hired 29 employees in about a week, owner Cody Miller said.

Miller said he received about 150 applications.

There were 309 unemployed people in Baker County in August, according to the Employment Department.

Miller said some of the people who applied to Grocery Outlet had current jobs.

Hydro-Dip, a company that paints items using water transfer painting, or hydro-dipping, has not had as much luck. When the company moved from Idaho to Baker City this spring it hired three employees. Much of the work at Hydro-Dip requires

months of training, and employees are hired for trial periods of at most 90 days.

Of the three employees hired, two left before the end of the trial period while the third recently was hired to a long-term position, said Todd Springer, Hydro-Dip's co-owner.

Baker County's nonfarm payroll employment has decreased by 120 since August 2017. The private sector dropped 50 jobs and the public sector dropped 70. Leisure and hospitality (40 jobs) led losses in the private sector while state government (50 jobs) led losses in the public sector.

McLeod-Skinner, Walden to debate

By Julia Shumway
WesCom News Service

Three candidates for Oregon's 2nd Congressional District will participate in an in-studio debate hosted by Bend television station KTVZ.

Jamie McLeod-Skinner, the Democrat running against 10-term Republican incumbent Greg Walden in the congressional district that covers most of Central, Eastern and Southern Oregon, has been pushing for a debate for months and publicly challenged Walden to a set of three debates, one in each region, when the two met during the Chief Joseph Days Parade in July.

Walden so far agreed only to a single televised debate at 7 p.m. Oct. 5. It will last an hour and include Walden, McLeod-Skinner and Independent Party of Oregon candidate Mark Roberts, who is running without the support of his party.

The television station will accept public questions submitted through a form on its website and will stream the debate online, but it won't allow an in-studio audience.

Other organizations, including the League of Women Voters, the Bend Chamber of Commerce and the Central Oregon Association of Realtors, are hosting live debates with audiences for local and state races in Deschutes County.

And the City Club of Central Oregon, an organization that hosts monthly discussion forums, volunteered to host a debate for the 2nd District.

Nichole van Eikeren, a spokeswoman for the McLeod-Skinner campaign, said the League of Women Voters and City Club both offered to host debates in Bend on Oct. 5, but Walden didn't respond to the invitations.

She said McLeod-Skinner still hopes to debate Walden in Southern and Eastern Oregon.

McLeod-Skinner's campaign said voters would be concerned about KTVZ's impartiality because leaders of the Missouri-based company that owns the Bend television station have contributed to Walden's campaign.

SCHOOLS

Continued from Page 1A

The curriculum, provided by Umpqua Bank, covers topics such as money values, banking, credit and debit cards, mortgages and credit scores, the press release stated.

At the end of the summer session, classes took field trips to the bank for a tour. Each student was given \$1 as part of the tour.

Witty praised Umpqua Charitable Trust for being one of the first organizations to recognize the value of extending the school year to help students avoid losing academic ground over the summer.

Umpqua Charitable Trust has provided \$90,000 in grants over the past three years to support Summer Academy. That money, along with other funding supplied by the Ford Family Foundation, Oregon Community Foundation and the Leo Adler Foundation has helped the district expand its extended programs.

This year's Summer Academy served an average of 173 students in Grades 1-6 for six weeks from the end of June to the beginning of August.

"We are truly grateful and we hope you keep it up," Witty told a group of Umpqua Bank employees in thanking them for their contributions to the school district. "We really appreciate what you guys do for us."

Witty and Board Chairman Chris Hawkins presented the employees with a plaque to hang at the bank recognizing their contribution to the Baker School District.

THINNING

Continued from Page 3A

As an example of how thinning can save communities, the Oregon Democrat cited a fire that was ignited by lightning one August afternoon in 2017 near the Oregon tourist town of Sisters. It spread fast. Residents in outlying areas fled as flames marched toward their homes.

Just a few months earlier, the U.S. Forest Service and a group of locals representing forest stakeholders arranged to thin part of the overgrown forest, creating a buffer zone around Sisters.

That effort saved homes, and perhaps the community of 2,500, by slowing the fire's progress and allowing firefighters to corral it.

His bill would allow more projects to receive funding in a given fiscal year.

"It's way past time to do a lot more on the front end to make our forests more fire resilient," Merkley said.

He hopes the Senate will take up the bill after the November elections.

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