

# Local & State

## State council extends B2H review

By Alex Castle  
East Oregonian

PENDLETON — The next step in the controversial Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line project and its pursuit of state approval will have to wait at least another month.

The Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) finished just a quarter of its review process for the project's draft proposed order at its monthly meeting in mid-December at the Red Lion Hotel in Pendleton, meaning the review period will continue at January's meeting in Hood River.

"This is a big and complex project," said Todd Cornett, the assistant director for the Oregon Department of Energy (DOE), who also served as council secretary. "But it's a really important part of the process for the council to be able to evaluate what's been done and ask questions."

Idaho Power, a Boise-based company, is leading the permitting aspect of the project, though PacificCorp and Bonneville Power Administration are also involved in trying to construct the 300-mile, 500-kilovolt trans-

mission line that will run through five Oregon counties and one in Idaho.

To continue with the proposed project, Idaho Power must secure a site certification from the EFSC, which oversees the development of large energy facilities throughout the state.

During the two-day meeting, the EFSC met to review the draft proposed order, the public comments on the draft — of which there were more than 470 individual commenters — and Idaho Power's response to those comments. While changes and suggestions for the order have already been made by DOE staff, which is recommending the council approve the order, this month's meeting allowed for the council to clarify its own concerns to staff and to provide other feedback.

Ultimately, the purpose of the council is to evaluate the application from Idaho Power within the context of over a dozen standards that all energy facilities in the state must meet.

"It's a standards-based review," said Kellen Tardaewether, a senior siting analyst, who has worked

as one of the project's staff leaders for the DOE. "The applicant has the burden of proof of demonstrating whether or not they've met the standards. The council isn't discretionary. Everything is based in rules, statutes and ordinances, and there must be legal authority for the decision-making process."

Though the other projects on the council's agenda pushed much of the review until next month, the council did get through discussions of general, organization, structural, land-use and soil standards, which included public concerns, such as wildfire risks, erosion and blasting.

One of the problems with B2H, however, is that many of the public's concerns of it can't adequately be addressed by the EFSC.

"For all of those folks that commented about land access, or having an easement on their property, or whether or not Idaho Power has contacted them to have conversation about any of that, the council doesn't have jurisdiction over that," Tardaewether said. "There's nothing the council can do to address that issue."

Irene Gilbert, co-chair for the Stop B2H Coalition in La Grande, attended the meeting both days and continues to be disappointed with the council's response to potential issues the public is raising.

"They do it with every standard, which they're supposedly evaluating in a black-and-white sort of way," she said. "They identify the problems with it, and then decide that none of the problems are substantial. So it isn't an objective process, it's very subjective."

Cornett, however, stressed that the project still isn't at a decision-making stage quite yet.

Once the council finishes its review, the project will move into a contested case stage, where people who submitted "relevant" verbal or written comments by the public comment deadline may further contest the order.

Once the contested order has been heard and any final recommendations have been made, then the final order may be issued and voted on by the council. If approved, an appeal to the order will go directly to the Oregon Supreme Court.

## LOCAL BRIEFING

### Chamber awards banquet Jan. 11

The 90th annual Baker County Chamber of Commerce Awards Banquet is set for Saturday, Jan. 11, at 5:30 p.m. at the Baker Elks Lodge, 1896 Second St.

Tickets are \$40 and are available at the Chamber, 490 Campbell St. More information is available by calling 541-523-5855.

### City parks board meets Tuesday

The Baker City Parks and Recreation Advisory board will meet Tuesday, Jan. 7, at 5:15 p.m. at City Hall, 1655 First St.

Agenda items include the planned construction of an all-abilities playground at Geiser-Pollman Park this spring, an update to the city's parks master plan, board goals for 2020 and a proposed project at Sam-O Swim Center.

### Programs at Interpretive Center

The BLM's Oregon Trail Interpretive Center is open Thursday through Sunday, from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m., with a variety of programs and pioneer demonstrations scheduled.

The Center, just north of Highway 86 about 5 miles east of Baker City, offers a pioneer story program at 2 p.m. on Thursdays and Saturdays, and pioneer demonstrations Fridays and Sundays at 2 p.m. A ranger-led program, "Oregon Fever!" is offered at 11 a.m. each day Thursday through Sunday.

The Center's network of 4.2 miles of paved trails is open every day from 9 a.m. to 4 p.m. Trails are not cleared of snow.

Free admission days this winter are Sunday, Jan. 19, in honor of Martin Luther King Jr. Day, and Monday, Feb. 17, in honor of Presidents Day.

The hands-on "Wagons Ho!" exhibit opens Jan. 24 in the Flagstaff Gallery. Visitors can pack a wagon, dress in pioneer clothing and learn more about daily life on the Trail.

Admission for adults is \$5; seniors \$4; and children 15 and under are free. America the Beautiful Interagency Park Passes are accepted.

The Center returns to its regular schedule, open daily, on Feb. 17. For a calendar of daily activities as well as special events in 2020, go to [oregontrail.blm.gov](http://oregontrail.blm.gov)

## Eastern Oregon University recognized for academic programs

### EO Media Group

LA GRANDE — Eastern Oregon University received a slew of national and regional recognitions in 2019, including a No. 1 spot for its online Fire Services Administration program.

The College of Business also earned distinctions for its online economics degree (No. 9 nationally), online business administration degree (No. 12), and its no-application-fee online Master of Business Administration program (No. 16). Now under new leader-

ship from Dean Edward Henninger, the entire college was named a College of Distinction.

"Our online College of Business programs continue to receive very favorable evaluations and national rankings by independent online publication sites dedicated to helping students and their families find the right higher education option," Henninger said. "The rankings confirm our commitment to providing affordable, high-quality and responsive degree programs

to serve the diverse academic and career needs of students. We are proud of such recognitions and each serves to heighten our dedication to academic quality, student access and career readiness."

Overall, EOU was ranked No. 9 for online bachelor's degrees in Oregon, and No. 10 for accredited online colleges. The university jumped to No. 77 in the U.S. News and World Report's ranking of universities in the West and came in at No. 37 among public schools in the region.

"Rankings like this let prospective students know that EOU is providing high-quality, transformational education in the West," said Matt Seimears, Dean of the College of Education.

Prioritizing access to education, Oregon's Rural University was also ranked No. 4 for affordable online colleges and No. 5 among those in the Pacific Northwest. Plus, EOU earned a Bronze recognition

for being Military Friendly.

Specific programs also stood out in the rankings. The newly revived MFA in Creative Writing was named No. 4 among online master's degrees in creative writing. Health and Human Performance also saw stand-out reviews for its exercise science program (No. 4) and online public health program (No. 11).

The College of Education

also earned top honors for its online master's degree program (No. 20), and online early childhood education program (No. 25). It's also under new leadership from Dean Seimears and was named a College of Distinction.

"When students come into a program and begin to see what their future can look like, that is priceless," Seimears said.

## United Way of Eastern Oregon closes its doors

By Sabrina Thompson  
The (La Grande) Observer

LA GRANDE — United Way of Eastern Oregon closed its doors on the last day of 2019.

Alex McHaddad, interim president of the La Grande-based charity, explained a number of factors played roles in pushing the organization's board to vote to end operations, including the structure of United Way of Eastern Oregon. Rather than have a specific focus or cause, he said, United Way of Eastern Oregon served as the collection point that passed contributions to other charities and service organizations in Union and Baker counties, including Baker City Backpack program, the Mount Emily Safe Center and Shelter From the Storm.

"Today people aren't as familiar when funding is generalized," McHaddad said, and thus less likely to give to a clearinghouse type of model instead of directly to organizations and causes they value.

United Way of Eastern Oregon on its 2016 tax filing reported total revenue of \$78,011 and total expenses of \$53,157, leaving an excess of \$24,854. But the following year's tax filing shows revenue dropped to \$73,482 and expenses leaped to \$104,654, putting the organization more than \$31,000 in the hole. The organization on its 2018 tax filing shows revenue plummeted to \$52,777. Total

expenses dropped as well, to \$60,814, but that still left a deficit of \$3,539.

"We lost some sources of revenue in 2017, but we didn't make changes to the budget," McHaddad said.

Changes in federal tax law made charitable donations less appealing for corporations, he said, and United Way of Eastern Oregon in recent years lost some major corporate sponsors, including The Observer, which contributed to the charity's annual September golf tournament. But the real hit to the bottom line, he said, came from Oregon's change that nixed employee payroll contributors.

The charity's board notified partner agencies on Oct. 25 about shutting down but did not reveal the decision to the public until last week. McHaddad said that was in part because there was a chance operations could continue. He said the board held out hope some federal funding would come through, but that did not happen.

"If it wasn't for all the structural things falling through, we probably could have survived," McHaddad said. "But this is not the end of United Way being here."

United Way of Eastern Oregon already has passed through the money it received for specific organizations, McHaddad said, while money without a designation will go to various charities. He said any remaining funds will

be seed money for whatever takes over the United Way for the counties.

"We are trying to save as much money as possible when closing so that we can have more to give to the community," McHaddad said.

United Way Worldwide is working on which branch could assume coverage of Union and Baker counties, he said.

Boise and Bend have United Way operations, but the nearest is the United Way of Blue Mountains, which has offices in Walla Walla and Pendleton. That branch came about in the summer, when the United Way of Umatilla and Morrow counties merged with the United Way of Walla Walla and Columbia counties.

**Ring in the new year!  
Have a happy & safe 2020!**



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2390 Broadway, Baker City  
541-523-5223



## Tax Reform Benefits Continue for Oregon Customers

Idaho Power's Oregon customers continue to receive a rate benefit resulting from federal tax rate changes that occurred in 2017. Idaho Power recently requested an increase of \$36,151 to the annualized Oregon jurisdictional benefits associated with tax reform, increasing the total benefit to more than \$1.5 million.

If this proposal is approved by the Oregon Public Utility Commission (OPUC) as filed, the typical Oregon residential customer using 1,150 kilowatt-hours of energy per month would see a \$0.06 decrease on their monthly bill beginning June 1.

Idaho Power's filing is subject to public review and OPUC approval. Copies of the application are available at OPUC offices (201 High St. SE, Suite 100, Salem, OR 97301-3398), the OPUC website ([oregon.gov/puc](http://oregon.gov/puc)), Idaho Power offices and Idaho Power's website ([idahopower.com](http://idahopower.com)).

Written comments can also be submitted to:

**Oregon Public Utility Commission**  
201 High St. SE, Suite 100  
Salem, OR 97301-3398

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