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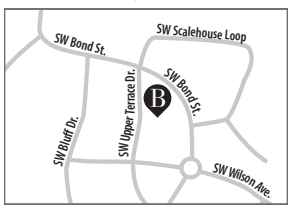

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LOCAL, STATE & REGION

Portland company proposes hydrogen hub

BY GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

PORTLAND — Eastern Oregon and Washington could become a regional hub for producing hydrogen fuel under a proposal recently submitted to the U.S. Department of Energy.

Obsidian Renewables, a Portland-area solar energy developer, has applied for $700 million in funding from the federal energy department to help build the project, which includes two anchor hydrogen production facilities, in Moses Lake, Washington, and Hermiston.

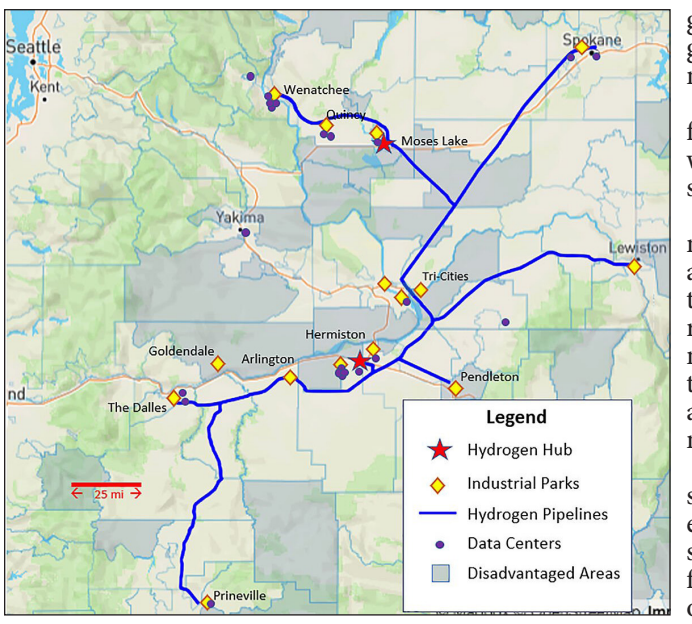
The hydrogen would be stored and transported around the region via pipeline, providing lower-carbon fuel for ports and businesses.

As part of the Biden administration's goal to achieve 100% clean energy nationwide by 2025, the federal government set aside $8 billion from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Bill to create up to 10 regional hydrogen hubs. Applications were due in November.

Ken Dragoon, director of hydrogen development for Obsidian Renewables, said the company faces stiff competition for the money — likening it to winning the lottery.

The region is already an underdog in the energy department's selection process, Dragoon said, compared to places like Appalachia where there is more opportunity to cut into the production of fossil fuels, or the Gulf Coast where there is already hydrogen infrastructure in place.

But the Northwest does have some advantages, he added. First, there is ample renewable energy on the power grid from hydro, wind and solar resources that can be used for making clean hydrogen. Second, both Oregon and Washington have passed targets for lowering greenhouse gas emissions, driving demand for alternative fuels.



Courtesy of Obsidian Renewables

Eastern Oregon and Washington could become a regional hub for producing green hydrogen under a proposal recently submitted to the U.S. Department of Energy. Obsidian Renewables, a Portland-area solar energy developer, has applied for $700 million in funding to help build the project, which includes two anchor hydrogen production facilities in Moses Lake, Washington, and Hermiston.

"We're getting outreach from entities in the region that want our product," Dragoon said. "They're coming to us."

The hydrogen would be made using a method known as electrolysis, coursing electricity through water to separate the hydrogen and oxygen molecules. Because the electricity would come from wind and solar power, that would make it green energy.

According to the project description submitted to the energy department, the hub will serve data centers, utilities, food processors and a variety of tech companies in the region. A map of the hub shows roughly 550 miles of pipeline extending from the two anchor sites in Moses Lake and Hermiston, connecting to 15 industrial parks across both states.

PORTLAND

Mark Graves/The Oregonian file

The city of Portland has increased the number of homeless camp sweeps, such as this one on June 28.

City increases homeless-camp sweeps

BY NICOLE HAYDEN
The Oregonian

In mid-October, the city of Portland removed more homeless encampments than at any point since the start of the pandemic, sweeping 87 in a single week.

And last month, city contracted workers again worked to remove as many tents camps as possible, clearing away nearly 80 in a week.

In October and November, the average number of sweeps increased fivefold from the first three months of the year, when clearing 15 a week was typical.

Overall, homeless encampment removals increased in April and May, when Mayor Ted Wheeler ordered an unprecedented mass sweep of the Old Town neighborhood, and have continued to climb since then. Those increases came as Wheeler piled up rationales for clearing more camps, including emergency declarations that banned camping along high-crash corridors and, later, safe routes to schools.

It's unclear where the people who lived in those camps have gone. But Portland-area shelters don't have room for most of them, and city and county data indicate most people uprooted from camping on public land don't want to live in group shelters.

The stepped-up clearing of encampments was made possible by doubling the number of contracted camp removal workers since the start of the year, said Cody Bowman, the mayor's spokesperson. In 2021, the city had 35 workers under contract, and by September 2022, there were 70.

That increase set the tone for what the mayor's office was ultimately building up to: declaring that camping would not be permitted anywhere in Portland outside of large city-designated camps. Instead, unhoused people will be offered a spot in a one of those city-run camping sites for homeless people plus some form of addiction treatment or mental health care, if needed. If they do not accept one or all of these offers and choose to continue camping in unsanctioned areas, they will be cited by the city, which could trigger court appearances, fines or arrest warrants.

Officials in Wheeler's office say the new rules will go into effect by 2024, though they say the first of six planned city-run tent sites, which will cluster up to 250 people together, could begin operating as soon as May 2023. City leaders jump-started their plan by approving $27 million at the end of November to begin constructing the city-run sites. Some of that money will also be used to hire new homeless outreach workers and workers who conduct sweeps.

In the meantime, sweeps continue to increase as houseless people's interest in moving into shelters continues to decrease. In June, the city began tracking how many people who were swept used a shelter bed for at least one night after workers offered them that option. From June to November, interest in utilizing a shelter bed following a sweep dropped by 24%.

To be sure, on dry, mild nights, people are more apt to sleep outside versus during severe weather.

When workers offer someone a shelter bed during a sweep, they also provide a ride to that shelter and storage for their belongings, among other services, Bowman said.

"Despite a growing homeless population, numerous shelter beds in Multnomah County go unused most nights," Bowman said. "Portlanders living outside in unsanctioned, self-sited campsites decline shelter offer for a variety of reasons."

Oregon State Hospital reports outbreaks

BY JAYATI RAMAKRISHNAN
The Oregonian

Three units at the Oregon State Hospital are under medical isolation due to outbreaks of COVID-19 and influenza.

Amber Shoebridge, a spokesperson for the state psychiatric facility, said two of the units are shut down for coronavirus outbreaks, and another because of the flu. She said the isolation protocols go into effect when there are at least two patients on a unit with a virus. It was not immediately clear how many patients are ill.

Patients living on the affected units will be "strongly encouraged" to stay in their rooms and to wear masks when out of their rooms, Shoebridge said, but they will not be prohibited from roaming about the common areas of the unit. All treatment will occur within the unit, and patients will stay in their rooms for meals.

Staff who work on the affected units must wear N95 masks and a face shield when working with patients, she said.

A spokesperson for the state's largest disability advocacy group, which works with state hospital patients, said patients have been complaining of not being able to get tested for COVID-19, even when they're symptomatic or have been exposed.

"As we've learned, without access to regular testing, patients can continue potential spread while they wait to become symptomatic," said Tom Stenson, the deputy legal director for Disability Rights Oregon.

Hospital officials could not immediately be reached about the availability of testing.

LOCAL BRIEF

Bend Park & Recreation District holds food drive, amid increased need

Citing an increased need for food bank resources locally, the Bend Park & Recreation District is holding a drive-thru holiday food drive on Saturday, an effort to fill the NeighborImpact Food Bank.

The district is asking people to bring canned foods, including proteins like chicken or tuna, soups and stews, vegetables and fruit and dried black and pinto beans and lentils.

Two locations will be open for donations from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. Saturday: the Bend Senior Center entrance of the Larkspur Community Center on 1600 SE Reed Market Road; and the parking lot across from The Pavilion on 1001 SW Bradbury Drive.

Garth Brown, food resource specialist with NeighborImpact, said in a press release that "the number of people who need food bank resources has increased 20% over last year," increasing the need for items to fill pantry shelves.

Donation bins are also available at Juniper Swim & Fitness Center, Larkspur Community Center, The Pavilion and the park district office during regular business hours through Jan. 2.

The district is asking people not to bring glass packaging.

— Bulletin staff report

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