

Providing an outlet for electric vehicles

OTEC opens new charging station in John Day

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

A new electric vehicle charging station in John Day is available for travelers this year.

The Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative opened a charging station for public use in John Day in March. The charging station on South Canyon Boulevard near the fire department still requires pavement work to be finished, but the site is fully operational and available to use.

Charlie Tracy, OTEC's director of engineering, spearheads their electric vehicle program and said they are starting to see the market around electric vehicles improve in recent years. He said they noticed the trend two years ago as technology progressed.

"We started to see that technology become viable around electric vehicles so we started to research on what we can do with EVs," Tracy said.

Tracy said, when conversations around proposed cap and trade legislation started, OTEC researched how the advancement of technology would play into the issues on climate change and the cost of transportation.

"Grant County is heavily dependent on transportation to have a strong economy," Tracy said. "We were seeing that we were in kind of a blank spot in the landscape. If you wanted to charge a vehicle in our region, there really wasn't anything available in terms of high-speed charging."

The lack of charging stations also created a concern for OTEC because the market share was low for EVs as the economy for his region became more dependent on tourist dollars.

"We certainly didn't want



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

The new electric vehicle charging station in John Day is fully operational.



The Eagle/Rudy Diaz

The new electric vehicle charging station is next to the substation.

to give travelers a reason to avoid our region by not having charging stations," Tracy said. "That was a reason why we thought it was important to get involved. As an energy provider, we had a role to play in making sure that the market was met."

OTEC worked with the city of John Day in choosing a location for the charging station. Tracy said it takes 51 minutes to charge an EV on average, so OTEC wanted to work with cities to install a station that would bring people into the community.

The station in John Day is within walking distance of Main Street businesses and restaurants. They applied the same method when they installed the charging station at the chamber of commerce office in Burns.

Tracy said they saw about seven charges last month at the station in John Day, but they are anticipating to see more as summer begins and COVID-19's impact on life hopefully declines.

"The station at John Day is fairly new so it'll take a little while to see how many people the station is really pulling in," Tracy said. "I'm optimistic that, as we get out of the pandemic, we will see more recharging."

The station in John Day is designed with enough capacity to add up to three additional stations if usage goes up, according to Tracy. There is also a Tesla charging station available at the Grant County Chamber of Commerce's office.

"Our vision doesn't necessarily include OTEC being the prime commercial charging network in the area," Tracy said.

The Oregon Department of Environmental Quality's Oregon Clean Fuels Program helped fund the charging stations and the electricity.

"It's not all member dollars, and we're not raising rates to put these in," Tracy said. "We are using all available funding sources for the charging stations."

Tracy said, along with the money that can be saved by using an EV, there are also environmental benefits as well with OTEC's power supply.

"OTEC's power supply is an almost entirely carbon-free energy source," Tracy said. "From a perspective of climate change, it's locally generated power, it's 95% carbon free and electric vehicles have a lot to offer."



Contributed photo

Former Eastern Oregon Trail Alliance board member Wade Tait provided a trail-building clinic for North Fork John Day Watershed Council youth crew members and Malheur National Forest recreation program employees at the site of the Magone Trail in July 2018.

Work continues on mountain biking trails

Trail alliance hosting volunteer workdays this summer

By Rudy Diaz
Blue Mountain Eagle

COVID-19 halted many activities, but work on Grant County mountain biking trails continued.

The Eastern Oregon Trail Alliance, a Grant County-based nonprofit group focused on cultivating outdoor recreation in Eastern Oregon, continued their work to improve mountain biking opportunities in Grant County.

"We're kind of building from the ground up," said EOTA member Darin Toy. "There hasn't been a big mountain bike presence here."

A bike park and pump track installed at the Seventh Street Complex were the first projects for the organization. Toy said the projects were geared toward beginners and local kids to show them other recreation opportunities in the county.

Toy said COVID-19 affected their ability to host large events last year, but

despite that, they continued to improve the pump track in John Day and brought a professional from Central Oregon to help with the improvements last spring. They also finished installing a bicycle work station at the bike park last year.

EOTA also worked on the Magone Lake project along with the Forest Service, which is a big priority this year. They completed one of the trails at Magone Lake, which is 3.8 miles long, called the Tinker Trail according to Toy.

"Those were our two big accomplishments even despite the COVID-19 pandemic," Toy said.

Another benefit of having the trail system is giving people another reason to visit Grant County. The new trails help promote recreation locally while creating interest with visitors looking to mountain bike and visit the area, according to Toy.

Toy said they are nearing a crucial point with the Magone Lake trail network.

"As community stakeholders, we are responsible for completing a certain number of miles (at the Magone Trails network) for our grant match," Toy said. "This year we're trying to make a push

out there to complete our mileage for the match."

He said the grant funding for the Magone Lake project came from the recreational trails program provided by the State Oregon Parks and Recreation Department. The development part of the match is to complete roughly 10 miles between EOTA's volunteers and the Forest Service.

There are monthly volunteer workdays, available to everyone, scheduled from May to October — with uncertainties about the May event due to COVID-19 numbers. A "big event" is also an overnight volunteer trail work event scheduled for June 5-6 at Magone Lake.

There will be monthly trail work days throughout the rest of the season currently scheduled for May 15, July 17 and Aug. 21. EOTA will continuously update their Facebook page regarding their monthly events.

Toy said residents can help EOTA by participating in the workdays, buying a \$25 membership or sponsorships.

"We are a local nonprofit, and we are a small family-oriented organization looking to promote healthy recreation in our community," Toy said.

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