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Shepherds Flat Wind Farm will move forward

DOD says it will no longer oppose construction of one of the world's largest green energy projects; Industry expects to hire more than 700 workers to complete project

By David Sykes
A months-long stand-off came to a close last Friday after the Deputy Secretary of Defense informed U.S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Jeff Merkley (D-Ore.) and

U.S. Congressman Greg Walden (R-Ore.) that the Pentagon would no longer block construction of the Shepherds Flat Wind Farm in Oregon's Gilliam and Morrow counties and would instead upgrade a nearby radar system which had, until now, put the project's future in doubt. The announcement would also eliminate the threat to other planned wind farms in the area that is adjacent to the Columbia River.

"In allowing this project to go forward, both the White House and the Pentagon have underscored their commitment to U.S. energy security," said Wyden. "As I have said throughout this effort, blocking this project would have had a chilling-effect not just on Shepherd's Flat but on private investment in new energy projects across the country. As a member of both the Senate Committees on Energy and Intelligence, I am convinced that national security and energy security are not only compatible, they are one and the same."

"The Department of Defense's earlier decision threatened to drop a bomb on job creation in central Oregon. Today's decision defused that bomb. This is great news for thousands of families who will earn a paycheck because of work on this project. And it will help contribute to Oregon's emergence as a global leader in clean energy production," Merkley said. "I thank the Department of Defense for resolving this issue and responding to our concerns about the negative effect that shutting down



Ione resident Linda LaRue speaks at a public meeting last Tuesday night. "We need the jobs this project will create," she said. -Photo by David Sykes

this project would have had on the Oregon economy."

"This is a major relief for the landowners, business owners, and community members who endured weeks of nerve-racking uncertainty over the future of the project," Walden said. "They deserve credit for remaining patient and engaged. Going forward, Congress must work on reforming this process to provide smoother siting while protecting security and aviation. Our great state can and should play a role in a strong national defense and be a leader in our country's smarter energy future at the same time."

If completed, the Shepherds Flat wind farm will be the largest land-based wind energy project in the world, producing 845 megawatts of power, which is the equivalent of a nuclear power plant. At the beginning of March, days before the project was slated to begin construction, the Pentagon brought the project to a halt, citing its concerns that wind turbines could interfere with a 50-year old radar system located in nearby Fossil, Oregon. Oregon's congressional delegation has spent the last two months pressing both the White House and Department of Defense (DOD) to discuss ways that the Pentagon's concerns might be addressed without halting new green energy construction.

DOD's announce-

ment today will allow the FAA - which on behalf of the Pentagon had formally placed the project on hold - to remove all "notices of presumed hazard," thus clearing the way for Caithness Energy to begin hiring the more than 700 construction workers that will be needed to build Shepherds Flat. While clearing the way for Shepherds Flat, today's decision still leaves undetermined how future projects may be affected. Oregon's representatives intend to keep working with DOD to ensure that national security objectives are met while not impeding efforts to increase energy independence and promote job creation.

A town hall meeting was held in Ione last Tuesday night with representatives of Merkley's, Wyden's and Walden's offices in attendance. About 60 members of the public attended the meeting to voice their concern over the hold up of the project. Patricia Pilz of Caithness Energy, Shepherds Flat's developer, was in attendance and said the hold-up was more than just about this project. "This is more than just about Shepherds Flat and an outdated radar," she said. "This project is being held hostage because of its size." She said the FAA and DOD were sending a message about all outdated radar stations and new wind farms across the country.

HEPPNER

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VOL. 129 NO. 18 10 Pages Wednesday, May 5, 2010 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

School district to appeal court ruling

By April Sykes

Morrow County School District Superintendent Mark Burrows told the Gazette-Times Monday that the district will appeal a federal court ruling that the district pay a former employee around \$200,000 for lost wages, benefits and damages.

Around a year after the district fired Noe Melendez, 40, who had worked for the Morrow County School District as a teacher's aide for Irrigon Junior/Senior High School and the Morrow Education Center, Melendez sued the district, claiming discrimination because of his national origin, race and a mental illness he claimed he had, in addition to his being disciplined by the district because he engaged in "whistle blowing."

The jury threw out Melendez' claim that

the district discriminated against him because of race and national origin. Melendez is Hispanic and originally from Mexico.

Burrows said that the reason Melendez was fired by the district was because he could not pass a math test required of employees under the 2001 No Child Left Behind Act.

Concerning the whistle blowing, Melendez had earlier reported the district for alleged child abuse by a teacher and an assistant football coach. Melendez said that because of the whistle blowing, the district sent him a disciplinary letter, transferred him to another school and then ultimately fired him. Ron Anthony, former Heppner High School principal, was Irrigon Junior/Senior High School principal at the time of the alleged abuse.

According to re-

ports, Melendez was scheduled to take the math test, but then said that he suffered from an anxiety disorder. The district then gave him 20 more days to take the test. The jury ruled that the district should have made additional efforts to work with Melendez. According to Burrows, however, Melendez met with the district only a day before he was scheduled to be terminated to inform them that he had an anxiety disorder.

Burrows maintains that the district has done nothing wrong.

The jury also ruled that the district retaliated against Melendez because he said he had a disability, in this case the anxiety disorder. The issue concerning the disability is a violation of the Americans with Disabilities Act, which was why the case was filed in federal court.

Missing wind-surfer found dead

On Monday, May 3, the Morrow County Sheriff's Office received a report of a missing wind-surfer. Friends of Jeffrey T. Young, 48, of Hood River reported him missing when his board washed up on shore and he could not be located. Young had last been seen between 3:30 and 4 p.m.

Units from the

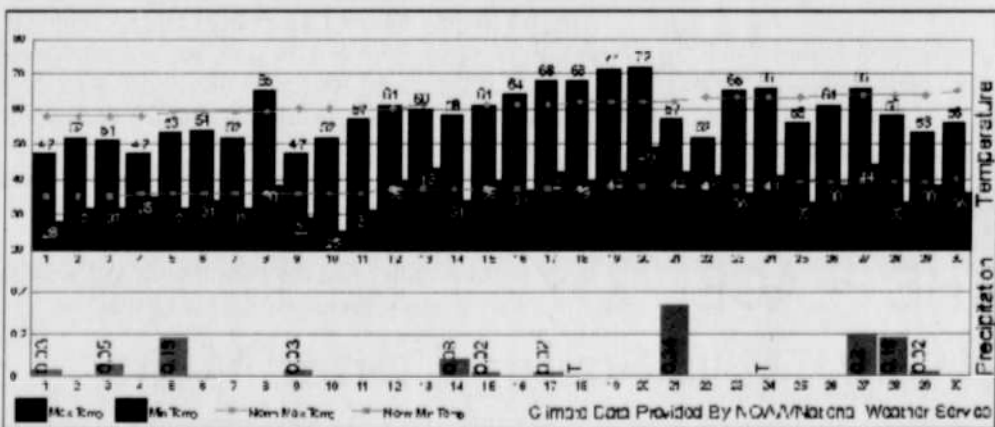
Morrow County Sheriff's Office, Columbia Intertribal Fisheries, Oregon State Police, Morrow County Health District, and Klickitat County Sheriff's Office searched the area until darkness hampered the efforts. A US Coast Guard helicopter from Astoria arrived at approximately 10 p.m. and continued to search from

the air aided with night vision devices.

At around midnight, the crew of the US Coast Guard helicopter located the body of Young floating approximately three miles down river.

Cause and manner of death is to be determined by the Gilliam County Medical Examiner.

NOAA issues monthly climate summary for Heppner



According to preliminary data received by NOAA's National Weather Service in Pendleton, temperatures in Heppner averaged slightly colder than normal during the month of April.

The average temperature was 47.4 degrees which was 1.8 degrees below normal. High temperatures averaged 58.3 degrees, which was 3.0 degrees below normal. The highest was 72 degrees on the 20th. Low temperatures averaged 36.5 degrees, which was 0.6 degrees below normal. The lowest was 25 degrees, on

the 10th. There were four days with the low temperature below 32 degrees.

Precipitation totaled 1.15 inches during April, which was 0.25 inches below normal. Measurable precipitation -at least .01 inch- was received on 11 days with the heaviest, 0.34 inches reported on the 21st.

Precipitation this year has reached 4.46 inches, which is 1.23 inches below normal. Since October, the water year precipitation at Heppner has been 7.60

inches, which is 1.88 inches below normal.

The outlook for May from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center calls for above normal temperatures and near normal precipitation. Normal highs for Heppner during May are 69.1 degrees and normal lows are 43.1 degrees. The 30 year normal precipitation is 1.67 inches.

The National Weather Service is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department.

Ballot drop sites announced

Election Day is May 18. All ballots must be received by 8 p.m. on Election Day. Morrow County drop sites are as follows:

New Boardman City Hall - 200 City Center Circle, Monday through Friday, April 30-May 18, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Election Day hours 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Irrigon Annex Planning Department lobby - 205 NE 3rd St., Monday through Friday, April 30-May 18, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Election Day hours 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Bank of Easter Oregon Ione Branch - 280 West Main St., April 30-May 18, 9 a.m. to 4 p.m.; Election Day hours 8 a.m. to 8 p.m.

Morrow County Courthouse, 100 S. Court St. in Heppner, Monday through Friday, April 30-May 18, 8 a.m. to 5 p.m.; Election Day hours 7 a.m. to 8 p.m.

For more information contact the county clerk at 541-676-5604 or visit www.morrowcounty-oregon.com.

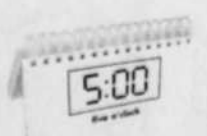
HHS performs spring play



"Alice" (Kolleen Chapa) and "Hatta the Mad Hatter" (Shane Smith) discuss the way to the next square in the Heppner High School Drama "Wonderland" directed by Jodi Chapa. -Photo by Sandy Matthews

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