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Large crowd comes out to protest early coal fired plant closure

By David Sykes

About 200 people, many of them employees, turned out at a public hearing in Boardman Monday night to protest the early closure of the Boardman coal fired plant. The hearing was in front of three members of the Oregon Public Utility Commission (PUC), which is preparing to make a decision on the future of the plant.

Members of the Oregon Public Utilities Commission came to Boardman Monday to hear testimony on the closure of the Boardman coal fired plant. Commissioners are (left to right) Susan Ackerman, Chairman Ray Baum and John Savage. *-Photo by David Sykes*

Portland General Electric had filed April 2 to close Oregon's only coal-fired plant early, by 2020, in exchange for installing $470 million less in pollution controls than proposed by state regulators. Under the company's proposal to the Department of Environmental Quality, Boardman would close at least 20 years earlier than planned.

The move left then left the PUC with three options.

1. Close the plant by 2020 and have PGE invest $320 million to install new burners in 2011 that reduce nitrogen oxides emissions and scrubbers in 2014 to remove sulfur dioxide.
2. Close the plant at the end of 2018 and invest $100 million in pollution controls. The expensive scrubber would no longer be required due to the earlier closing date, but some sulfur reduction would still be necessary.
3. Close the plant by late 2015 or early 2016, and invest $35 million to install nitrogen oxide and mercury controls.

The testimony Monday ranged from urging the PUC to pick the 2020 option, to finding ways to keep the plant open for the duration of its original life span until 2040. A decision from the PUC is not expected until November 9.

"We need change the direction our state is going," Morrow County Commissioner Terry Tallman said in urging the commission to choose the 2020 closure plan. He said the plant provides needed tax revenue to state and county coffers to pay for needed services.

Umatilla County Commissioner Larry Givens said the plant closure will affect Umatilla County also as 65 of the 110 full time employees of the facility live there. "The communities around the plant are not wealthy communities and we need the jobs," he said. He told the commission that losing the 110 full time jobs, as well as the 250 contract and seasonal workers, is equivalent to 14,000 jobs in the metro Portland area. 'When you make this determination consider the impact on residents and counties," he urged.

Rep. Greg Smith said not to dig economic hole "any deeper".

State Senator David Nelson said the decision to close is going to make a difference in school funding. "PGE is making a huge effort to do the right thing," Nelson said. "There are people in this state who want to be the first to shut down a coal plant," he said. "We need to develop more of our natural resources to fund public services," he added.

State Representative Greg Smith of Heppner testified and said the people who run the plant are "honest hard working citizens who

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Grant to help new collaborative improve health in Morrow County

$22,400 Regence Foundation grant to support Morrow County Community Health Improvement Partnership

The Regence Foundation recently announced it has awarded a $22,400 grant to support a new community collaborative called the Morrow County Community Health Improvement Partnership. The collaborative is made up of local health care providers and local government, community organizations and businesses. The group's goal is to improve health and increase access to care for residents in this north-central Oregon county.

Morrow County and its surrounding counties have been designated as a health professional shortage area for primary medical, dental and mental health care. According to the 2008 American Community Survey (accessed through the Oregon Office for Rural Health), 23.5 percent of Morrow County residents do not have health insurance.

"Community collaboratives across the state, like NEON in La Grande or HealthMatters of Central Oregon, have made major strides in improving health care access and quality in local communities," said Michael Alexander, Regence Foundation board chair. "Creating the Morrow County Community Health Improvement Partnership is an important step forward in addressing the health care needs of local residents in a thoughtful and data-driven way."

With the help of the Regence Foundation grant, the collaborative will work toward three main goals: conduct a county-wide health needs assessment, create a strategic plan to address findings from the health needs assessment, and increase its network of community partners. Already the collaborative includes representatives from the Morrow County Health District, the Morrow County Health Department, Columbia River Community Health Services, Community Counseling Solutions, law enforcement, faith communities, local business and government, recreation, education and transportation.

The collaborative had its first formal meeting on June 15, and will start work on the community needs assessment in September.

What the candidates say

The Heppner Gazette-Times contacted both gubernatorial candidates to get their statements on the proposed Boardman coal fired plant closure. Following are their responses.

John Kitzhaber

"As Governor, John Kitzhaber will work with the Oregon Public Utility Commission and Oregonians to develop a plan that allows the Boardman plant to be taken offline within the 2020 time frame.
That plan needs to address the following three points:
First, Oregon needs to locate, secure and turn the switch on for the lower carbon resources that we will use to replace the Boardman power.
Second, there is no question that ratepayer and taxpayer dollars will be involved, and we must be sensitive to how those resources are used.
Third, replacing this huge amount of power is likely to disproportionately affect two groups: 1) energy intensive industries that account for many jobs in Oregon; and 2) low-income ratepayers."

Chris Dudley

"The PGE plan demonstrates a good balance of cost control for rate payers and environmental controls. With new technologies in energy emerging so quickly, 2020 shouldn't be considered a date set in stone. One thing that is for certain, without investments in alternative sources of power and a strategic plan for transmission, an accelerated closure of the Boardman Power Plant would simply be irresponsible."

Chip seal work begins on several state highways in Morrow and Umatilla counties

Starting Monday, August 16, Oregon Department of Transportation maintenance crews began chip sealing over 50 miles of state highways in Morrow and Umatilla counties.

The chip sealing activities will resurface 10 miles of the Lexington – Echo Highway (OR 207) and another 40 miles of highway sections north of Pendleton on Oregon Highways 37, 334 and 335. Travelers can expect delays of up to 20 minutes with flaggers and pilot cars controlling day and nighttime traffic, loose rock on the roadways and reduce speeds at times. All motorists are advised to watch for road crews and flaggers, and slow down when traveling on fresh chip seal applications to reduce flying rocks. Law enforcement personnel will be monitoring these areas. Traffic fines are double the amount in highway work zones.

Chip seal activities began on the Lexington – Echo Highway (OR 207) on August 16 in the early morning hours. Crews expect to spend two days resurfacing the highway section between mile posts zero at Lexington and 10.1.

Starting August 18 crews will relocate to Umatilla County and chip seal the 10-mile section of the Helix Highway (OR 335) between the junction of Oregon Highway 11 and Helix.

Starting August 23 chip seal will be applied to the Athena – Holdman Highway (OR 334) between the junction of OR 335 and the rock stockpile near mile post 2. Later that week crews plan to move to the Cold Springs Highway (OR 37) and work on the section between Pendleton and the junction of OR 334.

During the week of August 30 through September 1, chip seal will be applied to OR 37 between mile post zero at the junction of U.S. Highway 730 and mile point 9 near Holdman. Depending on weather conditions, all work, including brooming is expected to be completed by September 3.

Chip seals consist of the application of emulsified oil and rock chips, followed by compaction rollers. The opperations help preserve and extend the useful life of the existing pavement surfaces. To prepare the surface for the chip seal application each pavement section will be broomed prior to rock application. To help ensure the chip rock properly adheres to the roadway, ODOT is asking ranchers to keep all cattle and other livestock out of the work zone sections until the rock chips have been applied. Animal waste prevents chip rock from adhering to the pavement surface, resulting in pot holes and other damage. Livestock can be driven on the route or returned to open range areas after the chip seal rock has been applied.

For more information on this project, contact ODOT Public Information Officer Tom Strandberg at 541-963-1330, or by email at Thomas.m.strandberg@odot.state.or.us.

This project represents some of the 50 highway construction work zones throughout eastern Oregon this summer. For updated highway conditions and travel information visit www.TripCheck.com or, call 511 or (800) 977-6368. If calling from outside of Oregon dial (503) 588-2941.

Harvest winds down

Mark Miller cuts a wheat field last Monday, August 9, on the Wickersham-Duvall property up Blackhorse Canyon out of Lexington. According to the OSU Extension Office and Morrow County Grain Growers, the wheat harvest this year is averaging 42-43 bushels per acre, up from last year's approximate 30 bushels per acre. As of Tuesday, August 17, the price per bushel was $6.40-$6.60 per bushel. There is approximately 20% of the wheat left to be harvested. *–Photo by David Sykes*

Heppner Gazette-Times closed for Labor Day

The Heppner Gazette-Times will be closed on Monday, September 6, in observance of the Labor Day holiday. The deadline for news and advertisements for the September 8 edition of the newspaper is Friday, September 3, at 5 p.m.

The Heppner Gazette-Times wants to see pictures of your trophy animals from this hunting season. Stop by to have your picture taken, drop off photos, or email them to editor@rapidserve.net.

BACK TO REGULAR HOURS!
HARVEST HOURS END AUGUST 23RD
7AM -5PM MONDAY-FRIDAY
7AM-12PM SATURDAY
Morrow County Grain Growers
Lexington 989-8221 • 1-800-452-7396 For farm equipment, visit our web site at www.mcgg.net