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Large crowd kicks off operation of Shepherds Flat wind farm

338-tower project is biggest in world

By David Sykes

A large crowd of investors, developers and elected officials gathered Saturday for the operations kick-off celebration of the world's largest wind farm, Shepherds Flat in Northern Gilliam and Morrow counties.

About 280 people gathered for speeches and barbecue on a windy day on Rhea Lane near Arlington to celebrate the start-up of the $2 billion, 845 megawatt wind farm. Planning for the project started more than 10 years ago.

Guests munched barbecue under a large tent as landowners, developer and end users extolled the virtues of wind power and the clean energy it will produce. A contingent of investors even made the trip from Japan to be at the kick-off, which was hosted by New York-based Caithness Energy.

Landowner Skye Krebs, of Krebs Sheep Company, dressed in cowboy hat and jeans, rubbed shoulders with suit-wearing investors from around the world, as everyone praised the long-running project that came to fruition.

Senator Ron Wyden was scheduled to speak but was held up in Washington, D.C., and unable to attend. Gilliam County judge Pat Shaw and her Morrow County counterpart Terry Tallman spoke of the economic benefit the project would bring to the two counties.

Caithness said it employed more than 400 workers during construction of the 338 tower farm, and will maintain a full-time staff of 45 workers.

In producing two billion kilowatt-hours per year, Shepherds Flat will have an estimated annual economic impact of $37 million for Oregon.

All the electricity produced by the wind farm will be sold to Southern California Edison, a Rosemead, CA-based utility, as part of a 20-year power purchase agreement.

Bob Foster, the mayor of Long Beach, CA, also made the trip to the kick-off, and said his city was one of the end users of the wind power the turbines are

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Local landowner Skye Krebs addresses the gathered crowd of investors, developers, landowners and others at the kick-off celebration near Arlington Saturday. *–Photo by David Sykes*

Obama to decide fate of Buttercreek wind farm

Chinese company says charges of possible espionage at nearby Navy Bombing Range 'not credible'

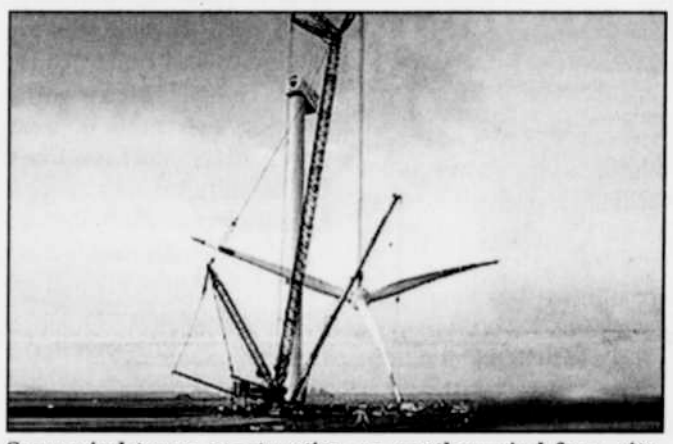
By David Sykes

The fate of the Buttercreek wind-farm project now rests with the President of the United States, according to a motion filed Sept. 19 in federal court in Washington DC.

Citing national security concerns, construction on the 20-tower wind farm located on Kent Madison's property near Buttercreek had been shut down in July by the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS). A Chinese-owned company was behind the wind farm, which is located near the Navy Bombing Range in Morrow County, and there had been concerns of possible espionage from the wind farm. CFIUS refused to comment on the stop-work order.

The project uses Chinese-built wind turbines; however, in court documents filed in a Washington, D.C., court, the Chinese-owned development company and wind-tower builder says claims of possible espionage "are not credible."

The Ralls Corp., which is owned by executives of the China-based Sany Group Inc., bought the wind-farm assets from another company earlier this year, without reporting the purchase to CFIUS.



Sany wind-tower construction on another wind-farm site. *–Contributed photo*

CFIUS monitors foreign investments in the U.S. for possible national security threats.

The Sany Group, which, among other things, builds wind towers, is one of the largest private companies in China. The company insists it has no connection to the Chinese government.

Speculation has increased that because of the proximity to the Naval Bombing Range, the towers could somehow be used to monitor electronic or other aircraft activity at the range. The closest wind towers are approximately five miles from the edge of the Navy's restricted airspace at the Bombing Range.

On Sept. 19, The Ralls Corp. filed a restraining order and preliminary injunction that would permit the company to resume construction of the Buttercreek wind farm. If the wind farm isn't in service by Dec. 31, then the company will lose $25 million in federal investment tax incentives, according to the court filing.

The two sides reached an agreement however, that will allow the "resumption of certain preliminary construction activities." Whether the project will be able to resume full construction is up to Obama He has until Sept. 28 to make that decision. According to the court filing, The Ralls Corp. denies any possible "espionage or other hostile activities because of the proximity of the planned wind farms to the Navy's Northwest Training Range Complex," or bombing range.

Ralls says it is only

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Health district shows increase in assets for 2012

By April Sykes

The Morrow County Health District showed a $465,435 increase in assets for the 2012 fiscal year, Michael Bell, CPA with Wipfli, LLP, reported to the district board at their Monday night meeting in Irrigon.

Bell, formerly with his own firm, Michael R. Bell & Company, the district's long time accountant, said it has been "a joy" working with the district over the years, especially with Nicole Mahoney, the district's chief financial officer. He remarked how fortunate MCHD is to have Mahoney, commenting that he has worked with "hospitals who have accountants with accounting degrees who aren't as good as Nicole."

Bell said that the district's increase in cash reserve is "definitely a good sign" and encouraged the board to maintain a good amount of cash reserves in preparation for upcoming changes in the healthcare system. He said that the district's bad debts and write-offs "are as low as can be," thanks to Mahoney and the district's business office. He told the board that the district maintains a "good healthy financial position" because of the cash reserve and because debts are fairly low.

Bell said that the community, by giving around $1 million in taxes to the district every year, is, in turn, bringing in around $5 million in payroll back into the community.

"The hospital is a big part of the economy, especially in the Heppner area," he said, adding that area businesses would "... probably have trouble if the hospital wasn't here."

Bell also remarked that whether or not the Affordable Health Care

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PERS expert, secretary of state candidate to hold town hall in Heppner

PERS expert traces retirement fund problems to 1971 when legislators were able to participate

A town hall meeting featuring Knute Buehler, candidate for secretary of state, and Daniel Re, an expert on Oregon's Public Employee Retirement System (PERS), will be held in Heppner on Sunday, Sept. 30, at 2 p.m. at Heppner City Hall. The public is invited to attend.

Also in attendance at the meeting will be Umatilla/Morrow District Circuit Court Judge candidates Lynn Hampton and Jon Lieuallen.

Re will tell how the current PERS is breaking the state of Oregon and what can be done to fix it.

The PERS problem is that, "Since 1971, PERS laws have been made exclusively by legislators who were or who could become PERS members. Since 1984, PERS judges have decided every PERS case.

PERS expert Daniel Re

"While PERS members are entitled to a seat at the bargaining table when public employee retirement benefits are determined, they are not entitled to every seat at the bargaining table. But that is what they have had since 1971 and that is why PERS laws are the way they are today. That's my problem with PERS," says Re.

Re has practiced law in Bend, OR since 1981. He is a lifelong Oregon resident and, in 2009, decided to learn about the PERS laws and how they had changed from the original PERS laws that were enacted in 1945. He then founded In RE The People, Inc., an Oregon non-profit corporation, to inform Oregonians about how the PERS laws were changed by legislators after the legislators were first allowed to join PERS in 1971.

Re has had written articles on PERS that have been published in the Bend Bulletin, the Eugene Register-Guard, the Oregon Catalyst website and the Oregon State Bar Bulletin.

In 2009, he established through the Oregon Attorney General's Office that an elected official's PERS membership status is subject to public disclo-

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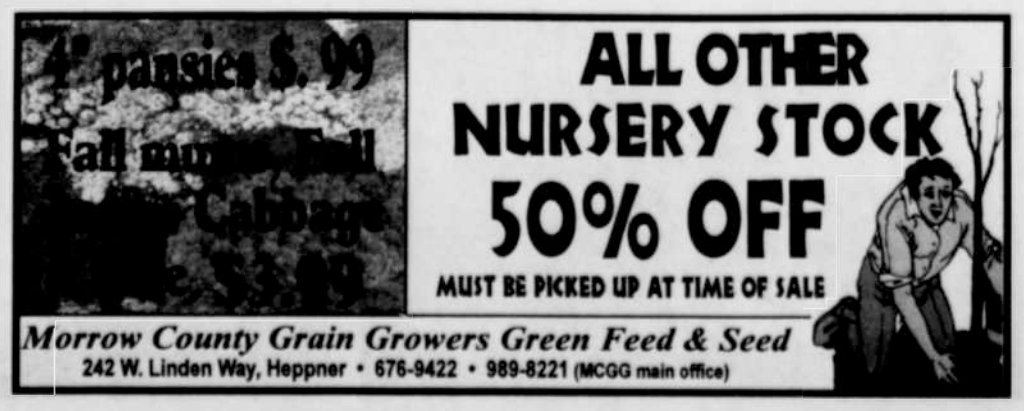
G-T Trophy Corner

Left: Troy Morgan of Heppner bagged this nine-foot, 350-pound alligator during a recent hunt on Florida's Lake Okeechobee. On the same hunt, he also shot an eight-foot, 175-pound alligator. Below: a foot-by-foot comparison shows what a monster this gator was. *–Contributed photos*

Think you can beat this? Send us your trophy photos at: editor@rapidserve.net