

POWERS THAT BE

-Continued from PAGE ONE and aesthetics.

Of particular concern to sfarm operations were aerial spraying and safety around the mammoth lines.

"We can't aerial spray (with these lines). We'd have to ground spray and that isn't always the way we can do it, especially in the summer when it's dry; the dust kicked up from the sprayer can adhere to the plant and keep you from getting a good spray job," says landowner Patty Matheny of Lexington.

"An airplane will not come within thousands of feet of those towers. What do we do with the weeds under those towers and for a thousand feet on each side?" questions Luciani.

Another issue mentioned by multiple farmers was the issue of conservation.

"We strive to be stewards of our ground, and we have taken our no-till to the point where it makes our soil mellow, keeps down the flooding, keeps down the wind erosion, because we don't disrupt it," Patty Matheny says. "They would come in there and just rip up the ground."

Several landowners also say working under the lines is a concern. Christensen says he has heard from landowners with such lines on their land who say there is risk of electrical shock from metal machinery, and that the lines can drain power from the batteries of vehicles parked near the lines.

"They (Idaho Power) tell you if you farm under these lines or if you are anywhere near these lines, you better have all your equipment grounded because you could be electrocuted," Luciani says, adding that the proposed line passes over not only fields but also farm

adding that he has seen similar 500kv lines sited less than a hundred feet from houses. "To me that seems unconscionable."

The one aspect of the project that seems to leave landowners speechless is the question of how the B2H will benefit the county.

"That's probably something that should be out in the open—of what benefit it would be to Morrow County? It would be nice to know what we would be getting out of the deal. In the end, if it would be of great benefit to the county, if it helps the schools, that might change some of our minds a little bit," Miller says.

It's a question that even McLane says is difficult to answer, though she says she believes the lines will prove to be a benefit.

"If you were just to look at it, you'd say we don't get a lot out of it at all. You have to look at the bigger picture to see the benefit," says McLane. "How should the county develop economically? Should we have diversification in our industries? Then how do you ensure those industries have the continued availability of reasonably-priced, always available, reliable power?"

McLane stressed that "industries" doesn't only refer to the Port of Morrow.

"Ag producers who may spend a lot of money for power to see their land irrigated will benefit from that power being available," she says. "Even those of us who live in our houses in Morrow County have a benefit to see that power is reliable and reasonably priced."

"When you look at the integrated resource plan for Idaho Power, what their directive was, from a higher authority, was to assure

B2H be routed around the county or, alternately, run along the I-84 corridor. Luciani says he attended the meeting and was heartened by the neighboring county's response. When he approached McLane, though, he says he felt stonewalled when his request for a meeting was denied.

"I felt like we were insignificant, farmers and our grounds, like it doesn't matter whose land it goes through or whose lives it disrupts," says Luciani. "We should have another open forum. They have meetings but no one seems to know about them."

McLane says the decision not to hold a public meeting had nothing to do with leaving landowners without a voice but a lot to do with timing. For one thing, a public meeting had been held at the Port of Morrow Feb. 11.

"It would have been a repeat of something that had already been done," says Morrow County Commissioner Don Russell. "There was a public hearing where anyone who wanted to speak was able to do that. There probably would have been no new comment or new participants."

Also, says McLane, the EIS March 19 comment deadline was looming large, leaving the county having to juggle priorities.

"We've had multiple discussions about it," says McLane. "We were approaching the comment deadline and part of the decision-making process (on the public meeting) was whether to expend the energy to have another meeting or to make the county's comments. We have limited resources and were trying our best to decide how those resources should be deployed."

More than anything, though, McLane says county involvement at this point is a moot point. Contrary to what many people think, she says, the county has no say in whether the project goes through, or even where it might go.

"The county will advocate for more public process, but we're not a decision maker. At the end of the day, the BLM is the decision maker," McLane says. "Are we working to advocate on (the landowners') behalf? We are. The advocacy we took at this point was to limit the impact to the most highly-productive agricultural land."

In fact, McLane's frustration seems to echo that of the landowners when it comes to dealing with the BLM process.

"It's a frustrating process. Oftentimes it's an incredibly secretive process," says McLane, adding that there have been several times when the county has not been given information or the ability

to provide input. "We have some status that the general public doesn't have but, as a cooperating agency, I've been incredibly frustrated with the BLM. We would hope that the BLM would come back and have more discussion."

"Nobody wants to see power lines go across their land but there's a lot less impact going across a dryland field than across irrigated ground," says Russell. "The county is trying to look further than the B2H line if we're going to do a power corridor through Morrow County, because there's potential for more wind projects. We need to take that into consideration and not just piecemeal this. We need to do some long-range planning and see where these lines would have the least impact on farmers in Morrow County."

All of this, though, does little to offset the frustration of landowners and farmers who feel their hands are tied. Klinger, who attended the Feb. 11 meeting at the Port, says he believes there is room for more public meetings.

"A lot of my landlords went through this in the 40s when they took the Bombing Range," he recalls. "I know sometimes unpopular things have to be done but it seems they're not listening to people out in the country."

"I think it would be nice if the commissioners met with possibly affected landowners as they did in Umatilla County. I think Umatilla County set a precedent there," says Miller. "Those who are concerned need to be engaged now, before it's too late."

And the idea of being "too late" may be at the center of the issue. Landowners like Christensen and Patty Matheny express concern over the power of the entities behind the B2H, as well as fear that strategies like eminent domain may come into play should counties and farmers push back too hard.

"In one crop year we can make from \$600-700 an acre on this ground but these people are threatening to eminent domain these things for \$250-300 an acre," says Christensen. "If someone offered a thousand dollars an acre I wouldn't take it. I've been here 25 years and I've taken a lot of risk and I don't intend to give it away for \$250 an acre."

"We're a fourth generation farm, and it's very unsettling for a company to come in and dictate to you how they're going to use your land," Patty Matheny adds.

Unfortunately, McLane and Russell can say little to offset that fear.

"The transmission line could come and we could not have a lot of say in it," says Russell.

"This line is going to happen," says McLane. "The county wants to advocate that it gets cited in the most responsible way." That she says, may mean running along a road

Comments from Idaho Power:

Editor's note: Idaho Power was contacted for comment but did not respond in time for comments to be included in the article. Below is additional information given to the G-T by IP Corporate Communications Specialist Stephanie McCurdy:

Is it on the table for Idaho Power to go down the I-84 corridor with this line? Why or why not?

Earlier in the B2H routing process Idaho Power evaluated a route that generally follows the I-84 corridor. A siting study determined it wasn't feasible for a number of reasons. More of the population lives near the freeway corridor, so that route would have had more impacts on a greater number of smaller landowners. That route had impacts to agricultural operations as well.

How would you respond to concerns about issues like aerial spraying and the safety of working under the lines?

A power line does have an impact that may require changes to operations. However, irrigated agriculture exists under power lines all over the west. A transmission line may require crop dusters to adjust the manner in which they spray. With respect to on the ground impacts, as voltage increases, wire height from the ground does as well. A transmission line will be much higher from the ground than a lower voltage line that runs directly to a home or business.

Other comments?

The B2H project would provide additional capacity for exchanging energy between the Northwest and the Intermountain West regions, depending on which region is experiencing the highest demand. Electric load is growing in the region. B2H will improve the region's ability to transmit low-cost energy from a variety of generation sources to serve residences, farms and businesses.

B2H is expected to be heavily used to import and export power to economically serve the energy needs of the region. The ability to exchange energy makes the region more efficient—it allows utilities to avoid the construction of power plants, which is good for the environment and helps to keep electricity rates lower for all regional utilities.

at the edge of a field instead of cutting through a dryland field or irrigated circle. "Any decision we (the county) make will be laid out in front of us by the BLM documents or the citing process documents. We are trying to get advocacy for our constituents in front of decision makers."

McLane says Morrow County did not, as Umatilla County did, advocate for use of the I-84 corridor. If the BLM picks up on that idea as a viable alternative, she says, it will change the game in Morrow County; how, she doesn't yet know.

"I would suspect at some point we would hear something from BLM about what these alternatives are."

McLane says she doesn't expect to hear anything from the BLM for 45-90 days, a period of time that will be as silent and frustrating for the county government as for the landowners and other interested parties. After that, the process will continue to drag on, continuing from the BLM's hands to those of the Oregon Department of Energy's Energy Facility Siting Council.

McLane says the real kicker, though, is that, should those agencies approve the siting of the line, there will be little anyone in Morrow County can do about it. According to McLane, once the citing council/BLM decisions are made, state law requires the county to issue permits without public input, a process contrary to how most planning commission decisions are made.

"Idaho Power and the other utilities involved have the power of condemnation, so we need to make it the least intrusive possible and accommodate everything, and do some real long-

range planning so we can accommodate all the power needs in Morrow County," says Russell.

McLane says she is not comfortable with the process, nor does she have much faith in the BLM.

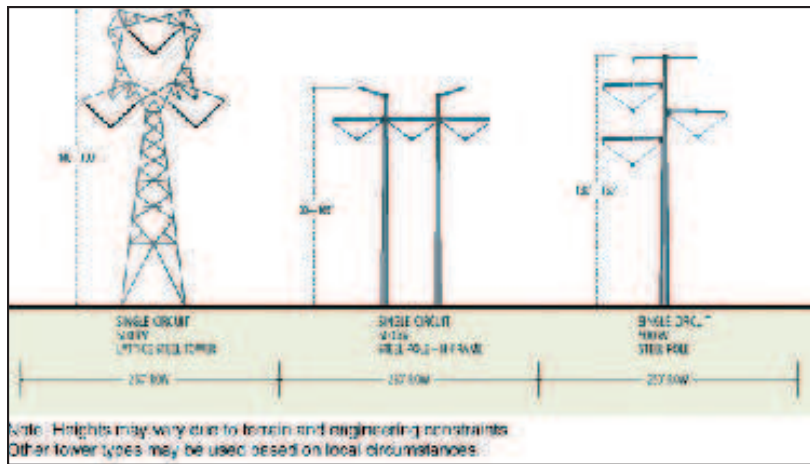
"I don't think the county is opposed to having a conversation with anyone who wants to come in and have a conversation about this. My question would be, what would the conversation be about?" she asks. "The county has tried to advocate for the best interests of the county, the entire county. Until the BLM sorts through this and they get to a point where there is a conversation to be had, I just feel (a meeting) would be a waste of everybody's time."

Still, local landowners insist that there has to be a way around the tangle, especially when they believe they see more priority being given to other concerns, including property owned by the Navy and other government entities.

"They could definitely use the infrastructure in place, use the 84 corridor and go ahead and take care of business, and not disrupt people's lives. They can do this without destroying people's homes and their farms and their families and their pristine mountain ground," says Patty Matheny. "They just need to leave us alone."

"I think they could put this power line down an already existing corridor," stresses Klinger. "I've got a nature conservatory over here by me. The line can't go across conservatory ground because of endangered species but they can come across my productive land that I make a living on."

"We're being put at the bottom of the ladder below the ground squirrel."



roads. "You have to ground every vehicle. I don't know how you could do that."

Landowners who live near the proposed lines also say they are concerned for their health and the health of their families.

"I would never, ever in this life put my family, especially with little ones, within several hundred feet of these lines because there are allegations of physical harm to children, pregnant women, virtually anyone who lives around these things," says Christensen,

that the western grid continues to function. There's issues around reliability, services, reasonability of cost. Those are nebulous, harder to quantify, but also important," adds McLane.

The issues that have Morrow County landowners up in arms also concerned Umatilla landowners, so much so that, after holding a public meeting Feb. 17, the Umatilla County Court drafted a comment responding to the BLMs draft EIS. Umatilla County's request was that the

Bag sale Wednesday

The monthly bag sale will be held at the Neighborhood Center in Heppner this Wednesday, April 1. Cost per bag is \$10; furniture and all merchandise on the tables will be half price.

The Neighborhood Center is open from 9 a.m. to 5 p.m. weekdays. Call 541-676-5024 for more information.



LADIES NIGHT

THURSDAY, APRIL 2ND

Ham, Potatoes, Salad, Rolls and Dessert

DINNER STARTING AT 6:00PM

Dinner will be prepared by Mary Haguewood & Crew

WANTED

Your Household Hazardous Waste

look for label marked "Warning" and "Danger"

Turn Them In! FREE

Friday April 10, 2015 Northend Transfer Station 69900

Frontage Lane, Boardman, OR

8:00 a.m. - 11:00 a.m.

Items not accepted: Empty containers, Ammunition, explosives, biological waste and radio active waste. Question please call 541-989-9500