

Summer heats up with warm, dry June

Moisture drops below normal for the first time this year

After a wet spring, June turned on the summer weather with low moisture and high temperatures—a trend that may continue in July, according to the National Weather Service in Pendleton.

The average temperature in June was 63.2 degrees, which was 0.4 degrees above normal. High temperatures averaged 77.1 degrees, which was 0.5 degrees above normal. On

two days, the temperature exceeded 90 degrees; the highest was 97 degrees on the 26th.

Low temperatures averaged 49.3 degrees, which was 0.4 degrees above normal. The lowest was 36 degrees on the 12th.

Precipitation totaled 0.83 inches during June, which was 0.55 inches below normal. Measurable precipitation of at least .01 inch was received on six

days with the heaviest, 0.39 inches, reported on June 9.

Precipitation this year has reached 8.32 inches, which is 0.34 inches below normal. Since October, the water-year precipitation at Heppner has been 12.64 inches, which is 0.08 inches below normal.

The highest wind gust recorded in Heppner was 40 mph, which occurred on June 8. Wind gusts in other areas of the county reached as high as 50 mph on June 26.

The outlook for July from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center calls for near- to above-normal temperatures and near-normal precipitation. Normal highs for Heppner during July are 85.7 degrees and normal lows are 53.9 degrees. The 30-year normal precipitation is 0.33 inches.

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

Onion Business profiles Stefan Matheny

Local man Stefan Matheny was thrown into the spotlight last month when he was featured in the online publication Onion Business. Matheny, 33, is director of sales at River Point Farms in Hermiston, OR. Onion Business profiled Matheny as a "Millennial Trailblazer."



Stefan Matheny

"Stefan, to anyone who knows him, embodies not only the youthful optimism and enthusiasm of his generation but is also a remarkably focused and 10-year veteran of the onion industry—all at age 33," the publication said of Matheny.

The Matheny name, of course, is well known in the area. Stefan is the son of Patty and the late Dave Matheny. A 2002 graduate of Heppner high

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Wheatridge sells wind farm

Big energy company buys project

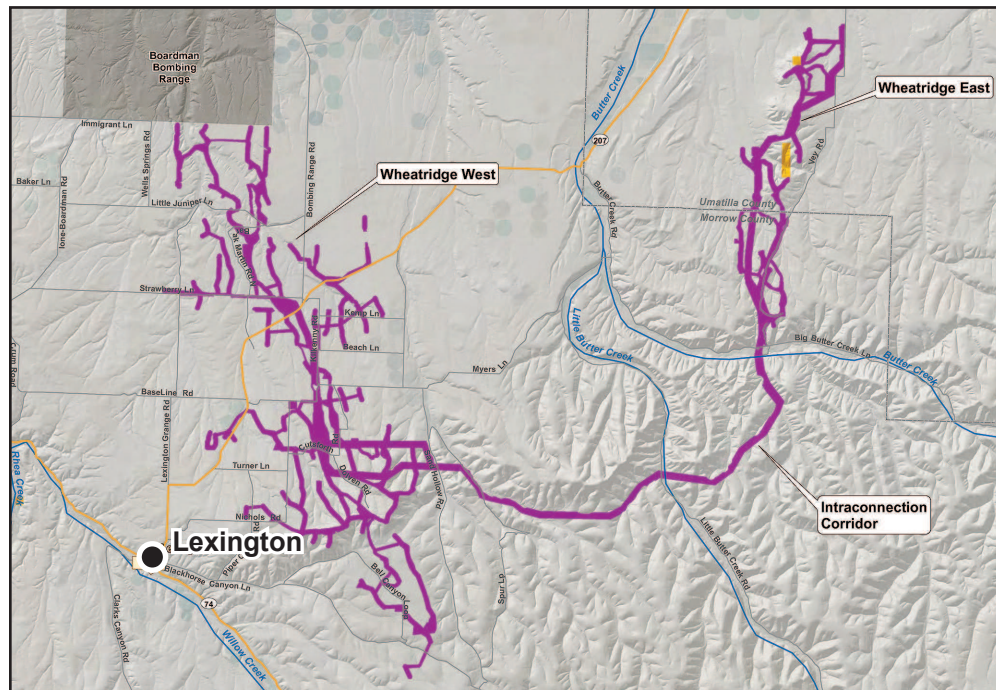
By David Sykes

A large wind, solar and nuclear energy company based in Florida has purchased the 292-turbine wind farm project that is ready to be built in Morrow and parts of Umatilla County.

NextEra Energy, based in Juno Beach, FL and billed as the "largest generator in the world of renewable energy from the wind and sun," has bought Ione-based Wheatridge, which is headed up by Ione farmer Jerry Rietmann and a group of investors. Rietmann has been working on the project for the past nine years and says it is finally in a position to be built.

Wheatridge recently received the final certification from the State of Oregon to move forward with construction of the 500-megawatt farm that, when completed, would stretch from Lexington north to the Bombing Range, and then have another section of turbines built on the Umatilla-Morrow county line near Buttercreek Junction on Hwy. 207 (see graphic).

In a meeting with the Morrow County Court June 7 Rietmann introduced the NextEra Energy project manager, Melissa Hochmuth, who said she is look-



A string of 292 wind turbines may soon be going up in Morrow and parts of Umatilla County now that the project has a new owner. -Contributed

ing forward to getting the project built. Rietmann said he and his partners sold the company feeling NextEra would be the company to "get something built in the 2019-2020 time frame."

"We have purchased the development rights for the Wheatridge wind project and are working to transfer the facility site certificate to...NextEra Energy Resources," said Bryan Garner, Manager of Communications for NextEra Energy Resources, when contacted by the Heppner

Gazette-Times last week. "We believe the proposed Wheatridge Wind Project will create tremendous economic opportunities for the region as well as bring more low-cost, emission-free energy to Oregon," he added.

Also during the announcement of the sale at the commission meeting, both Rietmann and Hochmuth addressed the ongoing dispute concerning "wheeling," or sending the generated power out to the grid once the wind farm is in operation. Columbia

Basin Electric Cooperative and Umatilla Electric Cooperative are presently in a dispute about who might end up building and owning a transmission line to get the power out. Columbia Basin filed a complaint in January with the Oregon Public Utility Commission accusing Umatilla Electric of encroaching on its exclusive service territory during talks with Wheatridge. So far the dispute has not been resolved, and both Riet-

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House passes OSP budget Restores funding to keep Eastern Oregon crime lab open

SALEM—Last week Representative Greg Smith (GOP-Heppner) joined with members of the Oregon House of Representatives to pass HB 5031-A, the 2017-2019 budget for the Oregon State Police (OSP). The budget restores funding for the Eastern Oregon Forensic Lab in Pendleton, which was slated to be eliminated in the Governor's Proposed Budget.

HB 5031-A allocates \$427,865,128 to the Oregon State Police Department, equaling a 4.3 percent increase over the agency's 2015-2016 budget. In addition to current service level funding, the Joint Committee on Ways and Means restored funding for the Eastern Oregon Forensic Laboratory in Pendleton. The committee also funded Policy Option Package (POP) 121, which provides \$1,005,000 additional funding to the lab. An additional \$370,645 will be on-going funding on top of their current base funding. The remaining POP funding is one-time expenses for moving the Eastern Oregon Forensic Laboratory from its current location into space more suitable for laboratory operations. Funding for this package was taken from marijuana tax revenue.

"Restoring funding of the Eastern Oregon Forensic Lab was a primary focus for myself and many who testified at the Joint Ways

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Irrigon fire burns three structures, sends one to hospital

Three structures were burned and one instance of smoke inhalation reported in an Irrigon fire started by a lawn mower Wednesday afternoon. However, MCSO reports that three homes bordering the fire were saved in the two hours it took to get the blaze under control.

At 1:23 p.m. June 28, the Morrow County Sheriff's Office communications center received a report of a grass fire started by a lawnmower on Snyder Road in Irrigon. With high wind conditions and structures threatened Irrigon Fire immediately requested mutual aid from Boardman Fire Department. During the course of fighting the fire, mutual aid was also requested from Umatilla County Fire District One and Umatilla Rural Fire. MCSO and Irrigon and Boardman ambulances also

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County extends Community Counseling contract, calling it 'gold standard' in mental health

Decides against admin fee but may do own audit

By David Sykes

Calling it "the gold standard" for providing mental health services, the Morrow County Commission extended Community Counseling Solutions (CCS) current contract until a new agreement can be worked out.

At an earlier meeting, the commission had discussed charging CCS a yearly fee for handling certain administrative services the county provides; however, at its last meeting it decided not to do that, but may go ahead with its own audit of the organization.

Up until 2007 CCS was a complete county program, operated by the county. At that time, however, CCS and the county decided to part ways, with CCS becoming its own entity and the county contracting for its mental health services. Funding for CCS, however, still comes from the state, and is administered through the county budget.

CCS administrator Kimberly Lindsay came before the court last week

to discuss her county contract, and said up until they broke away, they did pay the county an administrative fee, but since then have not. She pointed out that the county was providing some "in kind" payments to CCS with the reduced rent it had been charging the organization for use of the county-owned Gilliam Bisbee building in downtown Heppner. The county recently raised the rent from \$8,000 per year to \$23,000, mostly to just pay for utilities in the building. Lindsay said most counties do not charge their mental health providers admin fees. CCS is in the process of building its own new facilities in Heppner; however, construction has not been completed yet. Lindsay said she hoped the new facility will be ready in December or early January.

Under the CCS contract the county is required by the state to provide "oversight" on the program. All the commissioners agreed that CCS is a very well-run organization, and do not want

to change the relationship. They discussed, however, doing their own county audit of the organization to make sure they were satisfying that oversight requirement.

"We want a contract with you," commissioner Don Russell told Lindsay "because you are the gold standard that everyone compares to." He said the county "works hard" not to go out to bid on the CCS services and also cited the positive advantage of having CCS here with local people employed, living and spending money in the community.

Commission Chair Melissa Lindsay said she also thinks CCS is doing a great job and does not really see how the county could do any more oversight than the state already provides.

"I don't think we want to take funds away from the great work they are doing," she said, also using the term "gold standard." CCS has been cited, and given awards, by the state for running a top-notch organization.

County council Justin Nelson said he understood CCS was well run, but still advised both parties to protect themselves by having the audit for oversight.

"The contract is not looked at until there is a problem," he told the commission. Nelson said the oversight audit should prevent someone from coming back and saying the county was not doing its part with oversight, "and we are going to take the program away." Even though CCS

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