

Developer wants to alter proposed wind farm permit

Nextera Energy seeks higher towers, longer blades and battery storage on its Wheatridge Wind Farm

By David Sykes

The developer of an already approved 292-tower wind farm straddling both Morrow and Umatilla counties, has made application to the Oregon Department of Energy (ODE) asking to increase the tower and blade heights, and also construct two large battery facilities for storage of the wind-generated electricity. Nextera Energy made the revised application to ODE in April, and has not yet heard if its request has been granted.

If approved, the new plan would allow for a combined tower and blade height of 500.5 feet, or 24.5 feet higher than the current permit allows. The bigger blades power a more technologically advanced turbine which is best suited for wind generation in this area, the request said. The company also indicated they “may”, but are not sure, build fewer towers if the permit is granted.

The proposed wind farm is divided into two groups of towers with Wheatridge West located entirely within Morrow County approximately seven miles northwest of Heppner. Wheatridge East is located approximately 16 miles northeast of Heppner and will span Morrow and Umatilla Counties. There is also an approved 32-mile interconnecting power line between the two sites.

Also in the revised application is a request to construct two battery storage facilities, one 20 megawatt near the project substation in Morrow County, and one 30 MW in Umatilla County. The battery storage facilities would allow Nextera to provide electricity in a steady stream, instead of just when the wind blows. The company said the batteries would also help with “load balancing” when the power grid needs to provide different levels of electricity depending on demand.

Nextera has experience in battery storage at its facilities in both Pennsylvania and Illinois. The 20MW Morrow County facility would probably need around 3,000 batteries. The Umatilla battery facility would need more with its 30MW capacity. A converter would also be built at the site since wind power produces alternating current and batteries only store direct current. The power is then converted back into AC before it is fed into the grid for distribution



If a revised wind farm plan is approved by the state, a battery energy storage facility like this one will be built in Morrow County. The facility has 3,000 batteries and stores power generated from the wind towers.

to consumers.

No timeline has been given for when ODE may reply to the revised plan request, however, under the original permit construction, the wind project must begin by May 24, 2020 and be completed by May 24, 2023. To speed things up Nextera had asked the ODE to put the revised plan on a fast track approval process, saying the proposed revisions did not alter the original plan enough to require a higher level of scrutiny. The state disagreed, and said because of the addition of the battery storage facility and the unknown impact of larger wind blades on the environment, it would require the permit go through the longer process, including public hearings and public input.

At a May 16 meeting, the Morrow County Commissioners also addressed the wind farm changes in a letter to the Department of Energy. The commission voted to write a letter asking for the fast track process, citing one reason for quicker review as the length of time already taken to get the wind farm permitted. “...application was submitted in late 2014 and deemed complete in July 2015. It then took nearly two years to get to a final order and site certificate in mid-2017,” the commission wrote in its letter. “During that time, wind energy technology changed and efficiencies such as battery storage were developed or improved. With a potential buyer in sight and development pending, the need for a project utilizing current technologies is imperative,” the letter stressed. The letter went on to say the changes to the original plan were not substantial enough to warrant the longer-term hearing process.

The commissioners voted 2-0 in favor of sending the letter to the state, with Commissioner Melissa Lindsay saying she was abstaining from the vote because of a “conflict of interest.” She did not specify the conflict but did say she was not opposed to wind farms or people who make money off their property with the towers. However, Lindsay added, “I do think we should have a discussion with all of the people impacted by wind projects. I want to protect economic development which I am all for,” Lindsay said. “But I think we need to protect the people around it also.”

Morrow County Planner Carla McLane said the planning commission has talked a lot about renewable energy in the county with no agreement on having an open comment session on renewables. “It’s an allowed use (on agricultural zoned land),” she pointed out. McLane also added that there are currently no county standards for wind projects. “When you start to consider protecting a viewshed (what people look at) you have to be careful what you are protecting people from,” she said. When speaking about potential turbine noise, McLane said there are state noise standards on the books, but the state has no money to enforce these rules.

Ione summer reading program scheduled

Oregon Rocks is the 2018 theme for the summer reading program at Ione Public Library. The Rock and Roll Caveman presented by the Dragon Theater kicks off the program on June 12 at the Ione Library. “The puppet show starts with the caveman hearing a style of music, then continues to explore a wide range of music from

Baseball players selected for all-conference teams



Baseball players selected for all-conference teams are Wyatt Steagall, Peyton Lehman, Beau Wolters and Coby Dougherty. -Contributed photo.

Four Heppner Mustang baseball players were recently honored by being selected to all-conference teams for their performance on the baseball diamond this season.

Receiving first team all-conference honors and medals were seniors Beau

Wolters, Coby Dougherty and Peyton Lehman. An honorable mention all-conference award was given to fellow senior Wyatt Steagall.

According to a spokesperson, these four senior baseball players have certainly made a difference

in the Heppner Mustang baseball program over the years and they will certainly be missed next season. It is good to see their play this year rewarded by the conference coaches who voted for them to receive these honors.

Road 24 reconstruction completed early

The Umatilla National Forest announced that the Road 24 reconstruction project has been completed ahead of schedule. Equipment is being moved out of the area this week.

The Road 24 project, started in April, was located 15 miles northeast of Spray

and about one mile south of Bull Prairie Lake on the Heppner Ranger District. The segment of road under construction was between Highway 207 and the junction of FSR 2407, which provides access to Tamarack Lookout.

The contractor’s goal

was to complete the project prior to Memorial Day Weekend, but the contract was effective until June 8, if additional time was needed.

For additional information on this project, please contact the Heppner Ranger District at 541-676-9187.

4-H Club plants flowers



Heppner Grow Em & Show Em group planted flowers at the library. Pictured (L-R): Shayna, Zandra, Zabrena, Trevor, Aden, Cody, Brock, Adan and Owen. -Contributed photo.

The Heppner Grow Em and Show Em 4-H club chose to replant flowers at the library, pull weeds and pick up garbage throughout the park as their community service project. The members will be completing several more community service projects over the summer.

ing with Joe Lindsay, where everyone will be playing along on their own flutes and kazoos. July 24 wraps up the year with team geocaching at the Ione Park.” said Terry Feld a, program coordinator.

The program is also trying to be as bilingual as possible with story times in both Spanish and English. The library is also enlarging

their collection of bilingual books for young readers.

Program dates are June 12, 19, 26, July 10, 17 and 24 from 10 a.m. to noon and is open to all children ages four through fourth grade. There will be story time for the younger children along with crafts, science projects, music and snack time.

LES SCHWAB WOULD LIKE TO CONGRATULATE THE MUSTANG SOFTBALL TEAM FOR A GREAT SEASON



Back Row (standing): Head Coach Rick Johnston, Asst Coach John McCabe, Larysa Burreight, Ma-Linda Morter, Eva Martin, Kacie Gray, Tresslyn McCurry, Maggie Flynn, Alyse Wentz, Dakota Durfey, Madison Ashbeck, Cami VanArsdale, Asst Coach Janelle Ellis, Asst Coach Mike Correa Front Row : Gennell Blakley, Alexis Cutsforth, Sage Ferguson, Morgan Orem, Sydney Wilson, Morgan Correa, Aimee Turrell, Stephany Dubry. -Photo by Damon Brosnan

