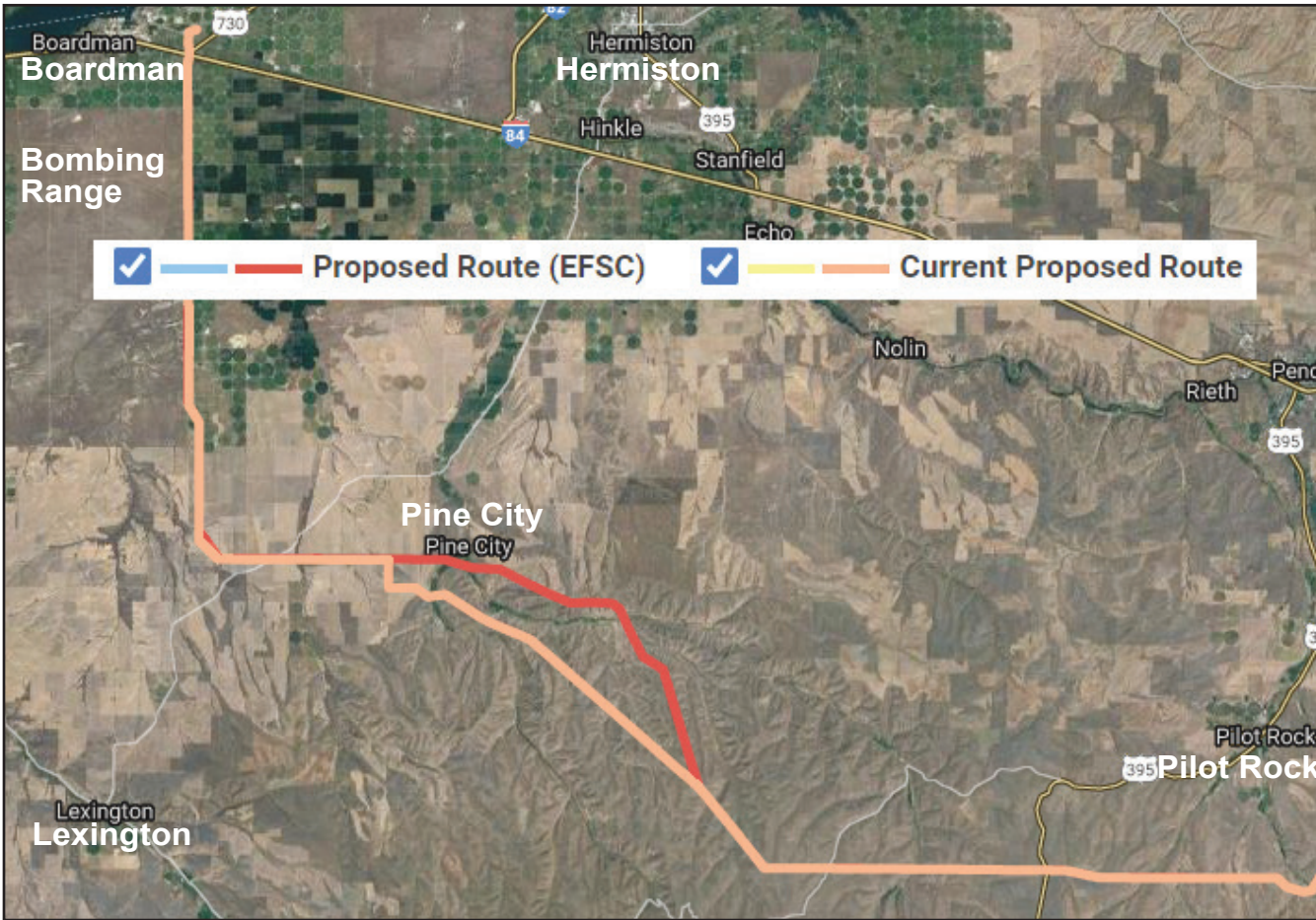




High voltage power line location brings crowd to county meeting

Route through Morrow County controversial



Where the high voltage power line will be located in Morrow County is still undetermined. There is a current proposed route and an alternate Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) proposed route currently under consideration.

By David Sykes

Although the long-running plan to build a 280-mile power line from Hemmingway, Idaho to Boardman may finally be close to construction, last week's commission meeting proved there is still controversy over where the line will be located in Morrow County.

A large crowd, mostly farmers and ranchers whose land will be under the power line, crowded the meeting room and into the hallway listening as Idaho Power representatives gave a project update, and explained how the company plans to obtain needed easements to build the high-voltage 500kv line.

Morrow County Planner Tamra Mabbott told the crowd she and Commissioner Melissa Lindsay organized the meeting after hearing frustrations from area landowners with the siting process. "I heard from landowners in the Butter Creek area about the frustrations they have with the siting process of the Boardman to Hemmingway line," she said. "It's

been underway for 20 years now and more robustly for the last 10 years," she explained. Mabbott said she and Lindsay contacted officials from Idaho Power asking them to attend and talk to landowners as a group, "get the truth out" and dispel rumors circulating around the project. Company representatives have apparently been in the area for some time talking to land owners about potential easements.

At the meeting from Idaho Power were Joe Stipfel, project manager, Kurtis Funke, real estate specialist and Jeff Maffuccio, siting coordinator. Also, there and giving a presentation was Kellen Tardaewether, senior siting analyst with the Oregon Department of Energy which is also involved in the process.

Tardaewether started off giving a complex and detailed explanation of where the Oregon siting process is currently, and what's left before final approval is given and construction can begin, which is expected to be in 2023. Officials say construction of

the high-voltage line should take three to four years. The process has been very complex and a look at either the B2H (which the power line has come to be called) or the Oregon Energy Department web sites shows thousands of pages of engineering, environmental and planning documents, maps and images.

But last week it came down to just the landowners in Morrow County who may be under the power line, face to face with the company representatives who will put it there. "I understand how everyone feels and I know it's not a pleasant topic," said Maffuccio, adding he did appreciate the "open dialog" with property owners. "We want clarity on what we are trying to do, looking at a different route through this area. I know everyone's preference is for us and this project to go away," Maffuccio said bluntly to the crowd. "Everyone is hoping for us and the project to go away, but that's not where Idaho Power is at right now," he said, indicating the project is moving

forward regardless. The company is in the process of making an adjustment on the route, and that application is in front of the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC).

"We're still looking at this as a major opportunity, along with Pacific Power (a partner, along with Bonneville Power) to serve customers in the future by sharing energy between the mountain west and the Pacific west," he explained of the need for the project. Maffuccio said there is wind development in Wyoming and solar in Idaho that is and will be generated and the company plans to "share it throughout the Northwest and the Pacific Northwest". He said Idaho Power is the minority owner of the line along with Pacific and Bonneville Power.

An example of the opposition to the project came from one Morrow County landowner, Leonard Van Burean, who also has property in Washington underneath high voltage lines. He says he has experienced fires and electrically charged tools and equipment from the electricity and doesn't want this now happening to his Morrow County property. (See related story, pg.2). When asked, Idaho officials said it was not economically feasi-

Port of Morrow mourns the loss of Ryan Neal



Ryan Neal

The Port of Morrow has announced the unexpected passing of their leader and friend, Executive Director Ryan Neal. Neal passed away the morning of January 18, 2022, from complications due to COVID.

"We lost a key member of our port family. We are all adjusting to the news.

His loss leaves a big hole. It won't be easy," shared Marv Padberg port commission vice-president.

"I know this will be a huge loss. I admire Ryan's dedication to the region and port industries. My heart goes out to the Neal family," says Rick Stokoe, port commission president.

After working in sales and management across the Pacific northwest, Neal was offered the opportunity to return to his hometown of Boardman in 2015 when he was hired for a management position at the Port of Morrow Warehousing.

Neal began his role as Port of Morrow Executive Director in 2018. He was passionate about giving back to the community he grew up in.

ble to bury the high voltage lines as it costs too much money, up to 15 to 20 times the cost of overhead lines.

Another farmer in the proposed path of the line asked why the company had to keep pushing the project when it would affect so many people's lives in a negative way. "There will be impacts on their lives for the rest of their lives, including myself, and those hazards and risks seem completely overlooked," he said adding he thought the county commission should investigate those risks. He said the line will represent "a huge firestorm that's going to happen," saying the lines start moving around when the wind blows. "The data shows those lines can start arcing at 35 mph and the wind at our place was recently pushing 50 mph. Nobody has done their research and you guys don't care," he said of Idaho Power. "When that thing lights up my wheat field then I'm done farming that for six years."

Maffuccio said as part of the Oregon siting process, the company is now looking at an alternative route rather than the original path through Morrow County, mostly to avoid wind power construction sites. "We started talking with some landowners about how we can avoid major constraints like the wind farms that are going on. We need to get it (the power line) away from wind farms and away from some landowners," he explained. Maffuccio said he understood that with the group he was facing, "What is most acceptable is none at all, but we are going to find something between here and there."

Project Manager Stipfel said the company's goal is come to agreement with all the affected landowners and obtain easements across their properties for the line. "We are committed to working with landowners to minimize the impacts.

We will not pursue it unless we have 100 percent buy-in from everyone," he said. However, later when one person in attendance asked if Idaho Power would use eminent domain, or the taking of private property through legal action for public use, he was told, "We try to get an agreement with every landowner the best we can, but unfortunately when we come to an impasse, yes we will have to. We prefer to keep it a negotiation between us and the landowner and not get the courts involved but unfortunately if that has to happen it's a path Idaho Power and the partners will go down," an official said.

One member of the audience said going with eminent domain would not be good for the company's image. "It will be bad publicity for Idaho Power and will get in all the press," he pointed out. "How do you guys as a company present this as an opportunity to us? Now that we have this huge power line. What do you do to turn this into an opportunity for us rather than just say, 'Here it's coming,'" he asked.

Idaho Power says it provides a potential backbone for future renewables development. Representatives said all power companies across the country and every utility are being told "get rid of coal. Coal markets are such that it is not affordable or feasible. What we've had for the last 60-70 years is coal and it is going away," they said, adding that natural gas (generation) "is the next one to go." "Solar and battery are the next viable technology, and I don't know what's after that," officials said, adding that the line "opens up the ability for landowners to have those products on their property. There is a lot of sun here," he added.

That prompted a complaint from other property owners who don't currently

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Transient arrested for stolen vehicle in Heppner

On January 19 at 5 p.m., the Morrow County Communication Center received a call from a female in Heppner, reporting a disoriented man going through garbage cans, looking for

food. The concerned citizen fed the man and called the Sheriff's Office with her concerns.

Deputy Daniel Thomas, Deputy Tamara Beardley and Undersheriff John Bowles responded and located the man in downtown Heppner. The subject advised he was okay and was looking for a way to leave town. He advised he took a truck from Pasco and ran out of fuel in Heppner.

The truck was located nearby, and the keys were locked inside. Dispatch confirmed that the vehicle was stolen out of Pasco. Contact was made with the

truck owner who advised the Sheriff's Office to go ahead and open the truck to retrieve the keys. Special Deputy Terry Harper responded to assist, as he is the resident expert with locks. The truck was then moved to the Sheriff's Office until the owner could pick up the vehicle.

John Quincy McClammy, 22, transient, was arrested and charged with Unauthorized Use of a Motor Vehicle. He was lodged in the Umatilla County Jail (UCJ) with a bail of \$10,000. UCJ also has mental health assistance for inmates if needed.