



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

50¢

VOL. 141 NO. 40 8 Pages Wednesday, October 5, 2022 Morrow County, Heppner, Oregon

Ribbon cutting held on opening of latest big, new renewable energy facility

Governor attends launching ceremony near Lexington



Governor Kate Brown listens to the Heppner High School Band at the Wheatridge ribbon cutting ceremony held last week near Lexington. Photos by Ryan Gerry



(L-R) NextEra Vice President of Development and Origination Jim Shandalov, Portland General Electric's vice president of strategy, regulation and energy supply, Brett Sims, Oregon Governor Kate Brown and Morrow County Commissioner Don Russell, cut the ribbon for the official opening of the new Wheatridge energy facility located near Lexington in Morrow County. Photo by Kayelee Jean Espinola

A ribbon cutting ceremony was held last week to celebrate the opening of the latest big renewable energy facility in Morrow County. Governor Kate Brown made the trip east to mark the occasion of a new energy project built here amongst the wheat fields of Morrow County. The project covers 14,624 acres across both Morrow and Umatilla counties.

Brown joined local leaders and NextEra Energy and Portland General Electric officials to celebrate the commissioning of what is the first large-scale energy facility in North America to put wind, solar and battery storage together for generating renewable power for customers.

The ribbon cutting was held under a large tent erected on Strawberry Lane near the intersection of Bombing Range Rd. and Hwy. 207 and featured short speeches by Brown, company officials and Morrow County Commissioner Don Russell. "Under my administration, Oregon has taken a comprehensive approach to reducing our carbon emissions and moving Oregon towards 100 percent clean energy on one of the most ambitious timelines in the nation," Brown said.

The crowd was entertained by music from the Heppner High School Band as local leaders mingled with officials from the state government and NextEra and PGE. A check from NextEra for \$2,000 was also presented to John and Paul Lindsay from the Heppner Future Farmers of America club as a donation for activities.

"We're pleased to have Wheatridge Renewable Energy Facilities located in Morrow County and to play a part in providing clean energy to Oregonians," said Don Russell, Morrow County Commissioner. "This facility provides jobs and tax revenue for our schools and county services while also supporting economic opportunities for the agricultural community. Wheatridge Renewable Energy Facilities also strengthens Morrow County's position in the region's clean energy economy."

The facilities brought a significant investment to the community. Construction of the Wheatridge wind farm, solar and storage sites created 300 jobs. Approximately 10 full-time employees operate the combined facilities. It includes 300 megawatts of wind, 50 megawatts of solar and 30 megawatts of battery storage. The battery storage system stores electricity not immediately used and delivers it when the wind is not blowing and the sun is not shining.

Power from Wheatridge will reach PGE customers via a new transmission line, constructed by Umatilla Electric Cooperative, that connects Wheatridge locally with the Bonneville Power



John and Paul Lindsay accept \$2,000 check from NextEra on behalf of Heppner's Future Farmers of America club. The money will be used for club activities. Photo by Ryan Gerry



The facility is the largest of its kind in North America to combine wind, solar and battery storage. NextEra photo

Administration's regional high-voltage grid. The wind towers actually went online producing electricity in 2020.

PGE owns 100 megawatts of the wind project. A subsidiary of NextEra Energy Resources owns the balance of the project and will sell its output to PGE under 30- and 20-year power purchase agreements. The NextEra Energy Resources' subsidiary built and operates the combined facility.

The solar portion of Wheatridge covers 357 acres of private land, however the entire project covers much more. The entire facility is divided into two groups, Wheatridge West and Wheatridge East. Wheatridge West is located entirely within Morrow County, bisected by Oregon Highway 207, approximately 5 miles northeast of Lexington and approximately 7 miles northwest of Heppner. Wheatridge East is located approximately 16 miles northeast of Heppner and includes land in both Morrow and Umatilla counties. Wheatridge West and Wheatridge East are connected via a 230 kV transmission line

Morrow County is becoming very active in the renewable energy production business, with another solar facility proposed on 7,450 acre, 11.64 square miles, just south of the bombing range.

Called Wagon Trail Solar Project, this facility is also being constructed by NextEra and is currently before the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council awaiting approval. The Wagon Trail facility has solar generation and also battery storage, two substations, a maintenance building and 1.5 miles of overhead transmission line included.

Another smaller 75-watt solar facility called Board-

man Solar has also been approved by the siting council. It will be located on 798 acres along 184 west of Boardman near the Gilliam County line.

County to receive \$1.4 million federal COVID relief grant

Few restrictions on use

Morrow County will receive \$1,462,104 in federal COVID grant funds over the next two years, and apparently there are few restrictions on how the funds may be spent.

The announcement recently came from Senator Ron Wyden's office. "This federal investment in rural Oregon and all parts of our state is timely and welcome news as counties work on their communities' needs to support roads, schools and more that all add up to a quality-of-life families and small businesses depend on," Wyden said. Morrow County will apparently have broad discretion on uses of funds similar to the ways it uses money from its own local revenue sources.

According to federal guidelines the county can use the money to "maintain or expand public services - such as health,

Local fire station and State Farm teach kids to plan their escape



Left to right: Steve Rhea - Chief, Linsey Kellogg, Tatelynn "Tater" Kellogg, Lt. Trevor Rhea, FF Kati-Lyn Zinter, Eric Chick - Asst. Chief

The National Fire Protection Association (NFPA) and State Farm are teaming up to educate kids about fire safety during Fire Prevention week, October 9-15. This year's theme is "Fire Won't Wait... Plan Your Escape," and the kits were created by NFPA to educate everyone about simple but important steps they can take to keep themselves and those around them safe.

Linsey Kellogg is one of many State Farm agents across the country delivering 4,400 Fire Safety kits from the NFPA to thousands of fire departments, including Heppner. The kit contains 500 items the fire station can use to teach kids the importance of safe evacuations during a home fire. The kit was donated in time for the fire station to have the items on hand to distribute in October, which is Fire Safety Month.

"Today's homes burn faster than ever. In a typical home fire, you may have as little as two minutes (or even less time) to safely escape from the time the smoke alarm sounds. Your ability to get out depends on early warning from working smoke alarms and advance plan-

ning," said Lorraine Carli, vice president of the Outreach and Advocacy division at NFPA.

Pendleton State Farm agent Kellogg encourages all residents to actively support this year's Fire Prevention Week campaign by developing and practicing a home escape plan with all members of their household.

"These materials capture the attention of young audiences, but fire safety education isn't just for school children," says Kellogg. "Fire presents a real risk to all of us, making it important for every member of the community to take evacuation messages seriously and put them into action."

What causes home fires? Cooking is the leading cause of home fires in the United States, starting almost half of all fires. Heating is the second highest cause, followed by electrical systems/lighting equipment and intentional fires. Smoking is the fifth highest cause, but is the leading cause of civilian home fire deaths. Candles are also a significant cause and are responsible for approximately 20 home fires reported every day.

educational, housing, and public safety services - to their communities with these funds. Recipients may also invest in infrastructure - from roads and bridges to water infrastructure - to facilitate economic development, improve health outcomes, or transition their communities to clean energy."

HHS celebrates homecoming this week

Heppner High School celebrates homecoming this week with dress-up days, a parade, a mud tug-of-war, cross country, culminating with Mustang volleyball and football games.

Following is the HHS Homecoming Week Schedule:
Oct. 3- Babies vs. Senior Citizens theme
Oct. 4- Anything but a Backpack & Anything but a Baseball Hat themes
Oct. 5- Blue & Gold, 6 p.m. Mud Tug-O-War & Bonfire
Oct. 6- Dress Like Your Hallway; 10:30 a.m. Parade & Pep Rally on Main Street.; 3:30 pm Cross Country @ the Thompson Ranch; 5 p.m. DIG PINK JV/ Varsity Volleyball vs. Weston-McEwen High School; 7 p.m. Mustang Football vs. Weston-McEwen High School.

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