



the HEPPNER GAZETTE TIMES

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Another solar project seeks approval

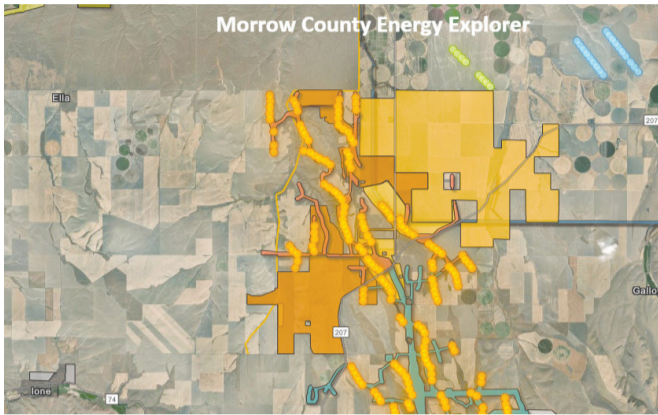
Weed control top of mind for county

By Andrea Di Salvo

Another solar energy project seeking to site itself in Morrow County moved one step ahead last week when the Morrow County Board of Commissioners approved a comment letter in support of the project.

The comment letter is part of the process for a company seeking a site certificate from the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC). This was the second comment letter the county was asked to submit concerning a site certificate for Wagon Trail Solar, a project of NextEra Energy. NextEra is headquartered in Florida but has “green” energy projects in 49 states, including some underway here in Morrow County.

The planned Wagon Trail Solar farm would not be as large as the nearby 10,000-acre Sunstone Solar but would be large enough—a 500-megawatt farm located on about 7,450 acres in central Morrow County. Morrow County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott told the board of commissioners that the company estimated it would only build on about



Map by Morrow County Associate Planner Stephen Wreessics - Contributed Photo

a third of the land.

While the comment letter to the EFSC expressed overall approval of the project, there were a couple of sticking points for the county, Mabbott said. Chief among those were weed control and Goal 3 mitigation.

A Weedy Topic

“We did make a note that we would recommend that a weed plan be required and that the weed plan be reviewed and approved by the county weed supervisor,” said Mabbott.

The letter also recommended that the site certificate owner, NextEra, should fund at least one full time position to implement weed abatement, as well as

submit an annual monitoring report.

Morrow County Weed Supervisor Corey Sweeney told the commissioners that the additional recommendations stemmed from problems with past energy facility agreements.

“This stems from some gaps in Wheatridge one and two, in monitoring and reporting some weed issues that have really developed in the last three years,” Sweeney said, “and kind of a mis-fulfillment of obligations in that weed draft.

“NextEra’s been great on rectifying, great on working with and trying to get this back in compliance,” he added. “These weed draft plans are a heavy

lift and a lot to abide by, and a lot to get right and a lot of expectations. It’s been a lot, and it’s been hard to accomplish.

In fact, Sweeney said he didn’t blame NextEra, but said he saw a need for more compliance oversight and coordination. He indicated that the learning curve had placed a burden on county resources.

“We’re trying to get it right, because we’re just seeing the tip of this, and now Wheatridge East is coming on,” he said. “It’s just going to continue to get worse if nobody catches it to make sure it’s taken care of and done properly.”

That was one reason he wanted to see Wagon Trail Solar have its own weed coordinator.

“That’s what we’re trying to do; do the right thing and get it to where we don’t have out-of-compliance issues, we’re not spreading weeds, and we’re not creating a huge problem,” he said.

Sweeney said that, according to ordinance, the draft plan only has to be submitted 30 days before

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Stuart Dick files petition to recall commissioners

By Annalynn Black

Stuart Dick, Morrow County resident, has sent petitions for a recall of commissioners David Sykes, Roy Drago, and Jeff Wenholtz to the county clerk.

The following is the statement provided on all three recall petitions.

1) All three Morrow County Commissioners

(BOC) refuse to cooperate or exercise transparency with MCHD (Morrow County Health District). They have not followed the established process for amending the Ambulance Service Area Plan, damaging the viability of the county ambulance service after approximately thirty

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Lady Mustangs advance to state playoffs



Team photo Heppner Lady Mustangs. -Contributed Photo

The Lady Mustangs made history on Saturday, February 17, 2024, by defeating Weston McEwen 44-36 and securing the third spot at the Blue Mountain District Basketball Tournament at the Pendleton Convention Center. This was the third and decisive clash between the two rivals, who had split their previous meetings. Heppner lost 45-48 at Athena on January 5th but bounced back with a 54-44 victory at home

on January 25th. The Lady Mustangs improved their record to 18-7 and earned the right to face No. 3 Regis in the first round of the State 2A playoffs on February 24th. Weston McEwen, on the other hand, suffered three consecutive losses to Stanfield, Enterprise, and Heppner in five days and dropped in the State 2A rankings. All four Blue Mountain teams will still

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Joint meetings paused

Morrow County- Following the second joint meeting on Feb. 13th, the Morrow County Health District and the Morrow County Board of Commissioners have mutually agreed to suspend negotiations and meetings temporarily. Morrow County Commissioners and Morrow County Health District couldn’t agree on extending the date for the ambulance service. The Health District offered a 2-year extension and proposed to use the current ASA for stability, but the commissioners suggested a 90-day extension until they receive an approved service agreement from the Oregon Health

Authority which should be in the middle of March. The Health District has expressed concerns that their employees are unlikely to stay for just 90 days, which puts their services at risk in the county. The county stated that they require the new ASA plan to be implemented before they can accept any long-term contracts. The county will assume ambulance operations on March 13. They expect a plan for ambulance service coverage from County Administrator Jensen at their meeting on Feb. 21. Morrow County and the Health District may meet again after OHA approves the ASA plan.

MCHD press release ambulance service

This update follows two meetings between the Morrow County Health District Board and the Morrow County Board during which the two parties agreed to come together to discuss a path forward for the ambulance service. Unfortunately, the two parties could not agree on an immediate path forward. Meetings between the two parties will resume when the Oregon Health Authority approves the Ambulance

Service Area Plan. MCHD is publishing this update to explain our stance on some of the important topics that have been stumbling blocks between the two parties. Why won’t Morrow County Health District extend the 90-day notice period? MCHD has agreed to an extension of two years. This is considered short-term in this industry due to the significant investment in equipment and staffing

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Cultural trust supports art, history through tax credits

By Andrea Di Salvo

The Morrow County Board of Commissioners recently learned more about a way Oregonians can support the arts and culture in their communities while receiving a tax break.

Jaylene Papineau of the Morrow County Cultural Coalition and Aili Schreiner, Cultural Trust Manager of the Oregon Cultural Trust (OCT), were on hand at the Feb. 7 board of commissioners meeting to share the unique way the OCT works with taxpayers to direct where some of their taxes go.

Schreiner said the Oregon Cultural Trust was created 22 years ago, in 2001. According to her, a diverse group had gone to the state and asked for a way to support cultural projects.

“They said, ‘You know, culture is happening everywhere in Oregon, and we’d like to make sure there are funds to support the arts and history and heritage that is important to each community,’” Schreiner said.

As a result of that, the Oregon Cultural Trust was created to raise funds through a state tax credit program and distribute them throughout the state.

The way the tax credit program works is that, if an individual makes donations to an organization like the Morrow County Historical Society, they can make a matching donation to the OCT, which comes back to them in the form of a dollar-for-dollar tax credit.

“This is a source of funding that is completely up to individuals,” she told the commissioners. “A lot of folks are not used to using tax credits, there aren’t a lot in Oregon, and this one’s pretty special.”

So, an individual who gives \$100 dollars yearly to a local cultural organization would also donate a matching \$100 to the Oregon Cultural Trust and would receive a \$100 tax credit. However, the tax credit is capped at \$500 for individuals, \$1,000 for couples filing jointly and \$2,500 for C-class corporations.

Schreiner stressed that supporting the Trust doesn’t mean paying more in taxes but being able to choose to some extent what state taxes fund.

“This is good news for those of us who believe in the arts, heritage and humanities and who help support that work with our own personal donations,” she said.

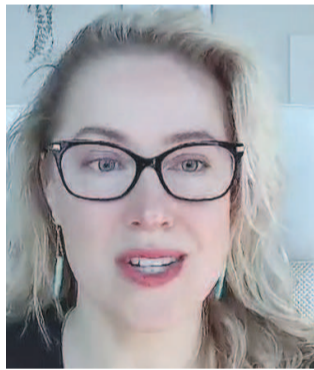
She told the commissioners the Trust has supported more than 1,600 culture nonprofits in Oregon.

“Which just speaks to how busy Oregonians are exploring their world and the meaning that they find there,” she added.

Schreiner said 60 percent of the funds get distributed to various organizations and projects, with the other 40 percent going into a permanent fund.

Of that 60 percent, half goes to competitive cultural development grants, a quarter to partner agencies like the Oregon Historical Society, and the final 25 percent to county coalitions and nine tribes—around 450 awards to counties and tribes per year.

In the time it’s been around, the trust has awarded more than 10,000 grants for a total of more than \$40 million throughout the state. This is done partly through a statewide network of cultural coalitions, groups of volunteers who make yearly



Aili Schreiner

grant awards.

The Trust also runs competitive grant programs, funds cultural work in Oregon tribes, and funds statewide service providers such as the Oregon Heritage Commission and the Oregon State Historic Preservation Office.

In Morrow County, it’s the Morrow County Cultural Coalition that partners with Oregon State Cultural Trust to distribute funds. Some of the areas funded could include the county rodeo, community parades and the Morrow County Historical Society, among others.

“So, wherever you are in Oregon, you have access to arts and history and heritage in your community,” Schreiner said.

On the other hand, the permanent fund is designed to provide interest and investment income for the Trust, which she said was especially important during times like the COVID-19 pandemic.

“It’s nice to have a permanent fund to leverage when the times call for it,” she said.

Another source of income is the special Cultural Trust license plate. The license plate was commissioned on the OCT’s 20th anniversary, and a portion of the fee also goes to the

cultural trust.

Schreiner said that, right now, an estimated five percent of people eligible for the tax credit are using it. That raises around \$5.2 million per year, but Schreiner says there is room for growth.

“If more folks simply knew about the tax credit, liked where the funds went and participated in it, the size and number of our grant awards would go up significantly,” she said.

“We’re unique in the nation,” Schreiner told the commissioners. “No other state has a way for its citizens to elect to send some of its tax dollars to a cultural trust, and then we in turn redistribute those funds around the state so that there are grant options available wherever you live in Oregon or whatever kind of culture is important to you.”

Papineau invited county residents interested in learning more to come visit with her.

“I feel pretty strongly about this program,” she said. “I’m a believer in keeping our history going.”

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