

Umatilla County favors southerly powerline route

County previously wanted line along I-84; senators ask for extension to comment period

By **GEORGE PLAVERN**
Staff Writer

The Umatilla County Board of Commissioners would rather see the proposed Boardman to Hemingway transmission line built farther south, as opposed to paralleling Interstate 84.

The board sent a memo in October to the Bureau of Land Management supporting the "Umatilla South" alignment that commissioners say would limit most impacts to farmland and wildlife.

Boardman to Hemingway is a 500-kilovolt, 300-mile transmission project that, if permitted, would allow Idaho Power to swap electricity between southern Idaho and the Columbia Basin during peak demand. Power lines would run from a substation at Boardman to Melba, Idaho, crossing five Eastern Oregon counties.

Routing the line has become a source of contention in the area due to interference with local farms. A number of route variations have been studied in the BLM's draft Environmental Impact Statement released in December 2014.

Earlier this year, Umatilla County submitted comments written by Commissioner George Murdock noting that most residents opposed the project. But, Murdock added, if the project must be built in Umatilla County, lines should follow an existing corridor along I-84.

Five months later, on Oct. 6, the board supported a new alternative — Umatilla South — that places the line south of the interstate away from farms near McKay Creek. Commissioner Larry Givens said the route also appears to avoid significant amounts of Washington ground squirrel habitat.

"Our concern and our



Todd Adams, left, of Idaho Power, discusses the Boardman to Hemingway Transmission Line Project with farmer Earl Aylett during a public meeting early this year in Boardman.

obligation is to do what's best for Umatilla County," Givens said. "The I-84 route impacts far more irrigated farmland and residences than Umatilla South does."

The BLM recently made I-84 its preliminary, environmentally preferred alternative for the line running from Boardman to just west of Pendleton. From there, it would dogleg south to avoid the Umatilla Indian Reservation.

The BLM is not bound by the environmentally preferred alternative, and all route variations will be analyzed in the final Environmental Impact Statement next summer.

As cooperating agencies, Eastern Oregon counties now have until Jan. 8 to comment on the BLM's revised preferred alternative. Oregon Sens. Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley do not believe that's enough time for the counties to conduct a thorough review. The senators, both Democrats, sent a letter Monday to Jerry Perez, state director of the BLM, asking for a 45-day extension of the comment period.

"Many landowners that are impacted by proposed and alternate routes for the transmission line have not seen all the routing options," they wrote. "As we understand, the cooperat-

ing partners have already planned to hold public meetings, yet the timeline that the BLM has put forth makes any concerns collected during those meetings moot."

Morrow County will hold a public meeting to collect input on Wednesday, Jan. 6, at the Port of Morrow. Umatilla County has not scheduled a public meeting.

Planning Director Tamara Mabbott said it has been challenging to engage local landowners possibly affected by the project.

"I think it has put these local elected officials in a pretty precarious position," Mabbott said.

Good Shepherd upgrades mammography equipment

Good Shepherd Health Care System recently improved its mammography equipment to improve breast cancer screening.

Realizing the sensitive nature and need for providing the best mammography system possible, Good Shepherd acquired what it says is the most advanced mammography exam equipment currently available, Hologic Genius 3D Mammography by Selenia Dimensions.

"When we were looking for a new mammography system, we knew we didn't want to settle for the status quo," said Rober Rose, diagnostic imaging manager for Good Shepherd. "We wanted to provide peace-of-mind for our patients. This led us to search out the best possible solution for the women we serve in our community

and the best resolution images available for our radiologists to use in diagnosing."

GSHCS mammography technologists, Susan Ross and Amy Seavert, also completed an eight-hour training course on how to conduct the new exam

The new system provides a three dimensional image for radiologists to review with up to 60 images.

GSHCS staff say the new system is especially beneficial for women with large or dense breasts.

Information based on clinical trials indicate the new technology increases breast cancer detection by 41 percent and reduces false positives by 40 percent.

Erna Bevington, a former employee of Family Health Associates in

Hermiston, praised the technology.

"I had my first mammogram at age 40," Bevington said. "It was a very unpleasant experience back then. I recently had my mammogram and was told about the new equipment when I made my appointment. This was such a different experience from my first."

She said "the clarity of the mammogram and the ability to see everything was amazing..."

The average exam only lasts about 15 minutes.

GSHCS Diagnostic Imaging Department will be hosting an open house event for community members to see the new equipment for themselves on Wednesday, Jan. 13, from 5 to 7 p.m. at 610 NW 11th St., Hermiston. Light refreshments will be served. To RSVP, call 541-667-3460.

Student video contest pays out cash prizes

High school students are encouraged to get creative and enter a video contest with cash prizes ranging from \$300-\$500.

Organized by the Oregon Young Employee Safety Coalition, past en-

tries have used drama, rap music and special effects to share workplace safety and health messages in the annual video contest, "Speak up. Work safe."

Entries can include music, storytelling with quirky characters or

serious themes addressing the potential for on-the-job accidents.

Students must create a 90-second or less video with the overall theme of "Speak up. Work safe." Submissions are due Mon-

day, Feb. 1. Guidelines are available at www.youngemployeesafety.org/video_contest.

For more information, contact Mark Peterson at 503-947-7868 or mark.peterson@oregon.gov.

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