

WOEC joins NoaNet to improve options for rural communications

From page 4

In an effort to explore options for expanding telecommunications service to rural areas, the West Oregon Electric Cooperative (WOEC) Board of Directors agreed to become a member of Northwest Open Access Network (NoaNet). West Oregon joins 11 other electric cooperatives, phone companies, municipalities and public utility districts in the NoaNet project.

NoaNet is a fiber optic network that parallels the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) electrical transmission system, creating an economical option for rural telecommunication needs. NoaNet has licensed fibers on the 2000 mile loop that BPA installed to operate its electric transmission system in Washington. BPA plans to extend its fiber system to Oregon later this year.

The board's decision is just the first step in the process.

"The board identified telecommunications as a strategic issue in our planning process last year," said Robert VanNatta, WOEC board president. "Our participation in NoaNet will help West Oregon Electric explore ways that we may be able to assist our members in receiving the same convenience and economic benefits as those enjoyed by their more urban counterparts."

"We see our membership in NoaNet as a possible opportunity to provide a vital service in rural areas that are largely ignored by the big profit-minded companies, much as we did with electricity nearly sixty years ago," continued VanNatta. "Our commitment to serving our members continues in that same spirit through NoaNet."

In April, WOEC members approved a bylaw change that would allow the board of directors to consider other business

opportunities that would benefit members. Those revisions passed by nearly a 3-1 margin.

"This seems like a natural fit for us," said Russell Green, WOEC general manager. "We are working with fellow electric cooperatives and the BPA. We

know the quality of these partners is very high, so that gives us a heightened sense of confidence and a greater opportunity for success as we consider whether or not to extend the fiber optic network beyond the BPA/NoaNet system."

West Oregon Electric serves more than 4,000 electric customers in portions of Columbia, Clatsop, Yamhill and Washington Counties. Headquartered in Vernonia, the cooperative has provided electric service since 1944.

SWCD can help with agricultural water quality plan

A new state Agricultural Water Quality Law, went into effect this past year. While the Forest Practices Act has regulated the timber industry for some time, this is the first legislation aimed at controlling agricultural activity in Oregon. The regulations, while largely aimed at full time growers, also control the activities of smaller, part-time operations.

The legislation requires rural landowners who have resource issues which may harm water quality, to show that they are taking steps to resolve the problems. There are no definitive parameters; the law was written in an open-ended manner so owners and managers could tailor plans best suited to their individual acreage.

Landowners with a minimum of five to 20 acres, who have livestock and/or stream corridor access, may be affected. Contacting the Columbia Soil and Water Conservation District (SWCD) to assure compliance with these new state goals.

Unlike the Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) and other regulatory agencies, the Columbia SWCD is a non-regulatory agency that advises landowners on practices and problem resolution with land use issues.

By enlisting the District's assistance, landowners can demonstrate efforts to resolve any water quality problems associated with their land practices. The state does not expect change overnight; it simply wants assurance that landowners understand their responsibilities and are willing to begin addressing problems.

Currently, the Columbia SWCD is trying to assess and



A rustic picnic table and benches are now nestled by the water just south of the Rock Creek Bridge, behind Shay Park. Though this spot is enticing on a warm summer day, it was developed so people could comfortably watch salmon on their upstream journey during spawning season. Construction was done by volunteers with the Upper Nehalem Watershed Council.

prioritize Columbia County's resource concerns. In April, a survey was mailed to county residents, seeking information. In an effort to better serve the public, the Columbia SWCD is extending the deadline for survey responses until July 30, 2001. Landowners completing a survey are eligible to win a free expandable self-contained composting unit (a \$50 value).

The SWCD, in partnership with USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS), also provides many services at no cost to landowners in need of individual management plans and cost-share assis-

tance with programs such as the Environmental Quality Incentives Program (EQIP) and Conservation Reserve Enhancement Program (CREP).

Landowners should consider joining the local Conservation Service District to determine how to improve water quality, waste management for small livestock operations, fish and wildlife habitat and other resource problems in Columbia County. Contact the SWCD weekdays at 503-397-4555 to obtain a postage paid survey form and/or program information.

Senators secure salmon funds

U. S. Senators Ron Wyden (D-Ore.) and Gordon Smith (R-Ore.) announced \$8.9 million in Federal funding for salmon and steelhead recovery efforts in Oregon. The Oregon Watershed Enhancement Board (OWEB) will distribute the funds through grants to citizen action groups for voluntary restoration efforts on private lands.

"The efforts of many dedicated Oregonians are making a difference in the fight for salmon and steelhead recovery," Wyden said. "This funding will enable more citizen-driven projects to move forward and preserve some of our state's most precious natural resources."

"Our state's salmon and steelhead recovery efforts are dependent on creative efforts

implemented locally and supported with funds from the federal government," said Smith. "While this money will help local watershed councils with on-the-ground recovery efforts, we will continue to fight for funding to enable Oregonians to meet the recovery challenges ahead."

Private watershed councils and conservation groups will be able to apply for funding. Salmon restoration projects and activities may include planning, monitoring, research, habitat restoration and protection. OWEB will evaluate proposals for their technical, ecological and biological merits when considering grant applications.

The \$8.9 million award is the second installment from Federal funding for the Pacific Coast Salmon Recovery Fund. Senators Smith and Wyden have strongly encouraged Federal support for salmon and steelhead recovery efforts in Oregon.

Oregon home loans ready for newly eligible veterans

The long-awaited home loan program for post-1976 Oregon veterans previously denied eligibility by the Oregon Constitution is now available. The new program is the result of the passage of Ballot Measure 83 last November. More than one

million Oregonians voted to expand eligibility for the home loan program to Oregon veterans who entered military service after 1976.

In announcing the roll-out of the new program, John Mangis, Director of the agency

said, "We have been working hard over the last six months in order to provide a quality home loan program for veterans who previously were not eligible. If you are a vet and considering a home purchase in the near future, you should talk to us about the many benefits of our program."

The fixed interest rate for the initial wave of qualifying homebuyers will be 6.25 percent. This below-market interest rate will help many younger

veterans with their home-buying decisions. In addition to the below-market interest rate offered, the program's other benefits include a 95 percent loan, up to a maximum loan amount of \$275,000. Veterans have the option of applying for a home loan through the agency's Salem headquarters or through any of a statewide network of approved lenders and mortgage brokers.

"We offer loans with low down payments and limited closing costs," said Mangis. "But, probably more important, is the fast and friendly service we provide to the veterans. It's a simple process with minimal paperwork."

For more information, call the Oregon Department of Veteran's Affairs toll free at 1-800-828-8801 or 503-373-2000.

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