

# A Different Kind of Blackout

*Coordination is the key when preparing for large-scale events in rural communities*

August 21, 2017, is a date many people across the world anticipate with high hopes of experiencing a rare occurrence in its full splendor.

Solar eclipses don't come along very often. The most recent seen in this area was in 1979. Were you around to see it and remember?

This event will unfold in dramatic fashion and last a mere two minutes or so, but that brief window has not decreased viewers' interest.

Having two of the counties that Oregon Trail Electric Cooperative serves within the path of the eclipse brings with it some unique opportunities and challenges.

For many months, OTEC has been involved with multiple planning meetings across our service territory. We have been coordinating with emergency management teams, law enforcement, cities, counties and private citizens to best prepare for the large crowds headed our way.

At last count, Baker County officials suggested we may have an additional 30,000 viewers to the region. Adding to that number is the Rainbow Family, which has arrived and set up camp for its annual family reunion in Grant County, bringing thousands of additional visitors into the Malheur National Forest.

The total number of people who may spread across Eastern Oregon could surpass 100,000. Oregon is expecting more than 1 million visitors for this event

from every corner of the globe.

No matter if locals question what the fuss is all about, the fact remains that a lot of people are very excited to come and enjoy all that Eastern Oregon has to offer—and they are definitely coming. Our area is so appealing because, according to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, our normal cloud cover in late August will be minimal compared to other areas across the nation within the path of totality.

While it may sound like a science fiction phrase, the path of totality is the 70-mile-wide path the moon's shadow traces on Earth during a total solar eclipse. It offers the best views of the event. In our area, the centerline for the path runs directly through Prairie City, Austin, Unity, Durkee, Lime and Huntington.

Lodging is booked throughout our service territory, and the overflow will be felt in areas such as Pendleton, Boise and anywhere

within striking distance of the path. Our small little towns will be inundated with enthusiastic visitors needing food, fuel, power and supplies.

For our local residents, it is a good idea to fuel up at least the Monday or Tuesday before the event. Groceries may be in short supply, so you might want to load up your larders.

Travel will be a bit of challenge on our two-lane highways, and the interstate system likely could be gridlocked, especially if a fender bender occurs. That's why planning ahead, adding extra travel time to your trips and, if possible, limiting travel in the local areas may be in everyone's best interest.

There is a world of information available on the internet if you are interested in learning more about the eclipse and what to expect in our communities.

Be prepared, be safe, protect your eyes—sunglasses won't cut it—and enjoy the show. ■



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## Keeping Community Informed

OTEC began a public awareness campaign in June that includes speaking about the eclipse on its monthly radio program and providing safety tips for the membership that include:

- Plan ahead—Fill up gas tanks, shop for groceries, fill medical prescriptions, etc., the week prior to the event.
- For members who live within city limits, try to limit traffic congestion. Use bicycles and/or public transportation.
- Electrical safety radio ads remind members to be safe around electrical outlets—from visiting relatives wanting to plug in their trailers to having too many devices plugged in.

Other safety tips include:

- Fly kites and remote controlled devices in large open areas away from trees and power lines.
- Never connect a generator into a home electrical system. It should be installed by a qualified, licensed electrician to avoid backfeeding onto utility lines and causing crews harm. Set up generators in a well-ventilated area outside of the home.
- Electrical devices and cords should be at least 10 feet away from water sources.
- Outdoor outlets should be ground-fault circuit interrupter outlets that switch off automatically. ■