sport class skier and Great Falls, Mont., resident James Rowen glides through the course at the annual Wood River Extreme Ski Joring spectacle south of Bellevue on Saturday, with mid-valley resident Kat Cannell leading the way on her horse Gone Without Tracey. About 600 spectators attended on Saturday and 360 on Sunday, according to co-organizer Michelle Bobbit. Seventy-three teams competed over the weekend. “It feels like a monumental point in winter,” Cannell said, “when horse people dust the

HOLD YOUR HORSES!

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Bill could change who pays for Idaho Power line

By GRETEL KAUFFMAN
Express Staff Writer

A
s Blaine County considers how to pay to bury a new power line through the Wood River Valley, its commissioners are hoping a bill from a local lawmaker sheds more light on what one funding option might look like.

The county commissioners are looking into using an underground local improvement district, or ULID, to pay to entrench an Idaho Power redundant transmission line, a project expected to cost upwards of $30 million. The seldom-used funding method would tax properties along the length of the line.

Under current Idaho law, any parcel of land that’s more than five acres is exempt from participating in a ULID. But parcels of land bigger than five acres account for about a third of the valuation in the benefit area, according to Commissioner Jacob Greenberg.

A bill sponsored by Rep. Muffy Davis, D-Ketchum, would limit the exemption to land that is actively used for agriculture, meaning large nonagricultural parcels would pay the assessment. Blaine County has never used a ULID before, and neither have any other counties in District 26, according to Davis. Local improvement districts are typically used for smaller-scale— and less-costly— projects, such as sidewalks, County Planner Allison Marks said last year.

“Not many counties utilize ULIDs, but when they do it would allow them to include

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Hispanic count poses census challenge

Outreach ramps up in the Wood River Valley

By GRETEL KAUFFMAN
Express Staff Writer

Blaine County is looking to boost participation in the 2020 census—including among one of its hardest-to-reach populations.

A campaign to reach out to Hispanic residents of the Wood River Valley will likely include posters, live events and ads on local Spanish language radio. The key, leaders say, is building trust through familiarity: putting local names and faces to the nationwide census.

With controversial immigration-related practices in the national headlines, a sense of fear and distrust toward the federal government has grown in the local Hispanic community in recent years, said Herbert Romero, a community advocate in the Wood River Valley and member of the Blaine County Complete Count Committee.

“When you’re hearing about sanctuary cities, DMV licenses and programs that impact your documents in the sense of future residency or citizenship... then you say ‘Wait a minute, I don’t see the benefit of participating in something like the census,’” Romero said.

The task that’s now before Romero and other community leaders: educating people on what the census is and how their information will be used. For families that only speak Spanish, the challenges are twofold.

There are “two prongs to the problem”—fear and a lack of awareness—said Margie Gonzalez, executive director of the Idaho Commission on Hispanic Affairs. With the census approaching, Gonzalez said, she’s “not really feeling confident” that Hispanic Idahoans and other marginalized populations will be thoroughly counted.

“I don’t know that we’ve done enough to assure that these communities are going to be counted accurately,” Gonzalez said. “And that’s going to affect everyone.”

Each year, the federal government distributes more than $875 billion to states and communities based on Census Bureau information. Census data can affect funding for schools, roads, hospitals, bus routes and other community programs and infrastructure.

“As communities change, so do their needs,” said Misty Slater, a spokeswoman for the U.S. Census Bureau in Idaho, Oregon and Nevada. “The census happens every 10 years, and this is your once-in-a-decade chance to contribute to a better future for you and your community.”

Latinos aren’t the only hard-to-count population in Idaho. Similar efforts have been made to reach out to other communities, such as Native American, Filipino and LGBTQ Idahoans. Senior citizens and people living in very rural areas can also present a challenge.

Getting an early start on preparation is key, Gonzalez said. Idaho’s Filipino community, for example, began

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ICE, TIGHT BUDGET CHILL BELLEVUE STREETS

Sun Valley couple’s coronavirus odyssey

Cops catch alleged Warm Springs thief

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