

Mini-megaloads head for Montana via U.S. 95

Eric Barker/Lewiston Tribune

Mini-megaloads were scheduled to depart from the Port of Wilma Tuesday night and make their way to Montana via U.S. Highway 95 and Interstate 90.

According to a news release from the Idaho Transportation Department, the four loads to be moved by the shipping company Omega Morgan are 20.1 feet wide, 15.6 feet tall, 75 feet long and weigh less than 80,000 pounds. Although far smaller than the 21-foot-wide,

255-foot-long and 644,00-pound megaloads that spawned protests and a federal court injunction on U.S. Highway 12 in August, they still required flagging teams and pilot cars. The mini-megaloads also had the potential to cause delays lasting as long as 15 minutes, according to the state.

"This is smaller, lighter equipment," said Adam Rush, a spokesman for the transportation department. "This is different equipment; they are called sump sections, it is different from the piece of equipment that is still at the Port of Wilma."

In August, the shipment of a massive water evaporator east on U.S. Highway 12 through a portion of the Nez Perce-Clearwater National Forest led to four nights of protests, dozens of arrests and a court case filed by the Nez Perce Tribe and Idaho Rivers United against the U.S. Forest Service. In that case, federal Judge B. Lynn Winmill forced the Forest Service to close the highway to the shipments pending a study by the agency on their effects and consultation with the tribe.

Winmill's injunction stalled plans by Resources Conservation Company International, a subsidiary of General Electric Co. that built the equipment to be used in the oil fields of Alberta, Canada, to ship as many as eight similar-sized loads on the highway. One remains in limbo at the Port of Wilma, where it was shipped by barge.

The company asked Winmill to reconsider his decision last month. He did, but refused to stay the injunction. On Friday, the company filed a notice of appeal with the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals.

LuJean Smith, global communications leader for GE Water Process Technologies, declined to comment on the appeal or Tuesday's shipments. The transportation department did not indicate the destination of the smaller loads.

Barker may be contacted at ebarker@lmtribune.com or at (208) 848-2273. Follow him on Twitter @ezebarker.