



Wednesday, August 26, 2009

Letter: EGA is important wildlife corridor

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When I attended the Umatilla County Planning Commission meeting on July 23 to listen to the debate about the Goal 5 proposal to block the placement of wind turbines from a 200,000 acre swath of Umatilla County, I thought the issue was the view. I am a strong proponent of the development of alternative energy sources in order to slow greenhouse warming, and I attended this meeting with the idea of confronting my own potentially hypocritical response of "not in my backyard" to the placement of big, unsightly wind turbines. However, after listening to the excellent panel of presenters organized by county Planning Director Tamra Mabott, I left with a very different feeling that what is primarily and critically at stake is a crucial wildlife corridor, as well as a potential for severe impact upon the Walla Walla watershed.

I was most struck by the presentation of the findings of the Western Governors Association Wildlife Corridors Initiative, so I went home and looked it up on Google. The WGA, according to their Web site, is an organization representing 19 western states through which the governors can identify and address key governance issues relating to natural resources, the environment, and economic development, formulate policy and take action that promotes Western interests. Their 2008-09 strategic agenda is the acceleration of the development of clean energy and electricity transmission, ensuring Western water supply and quality, and developing alternative transportation fuels to reduce dependency on foreign oil.

The WGA, in June 2008, adopted the "Wildlife Corridors Initiative Report," and created the Western Governors Wildlife Council "for the purpose of coordinating and overseeing implementation of the report, so that we can identify key wildlife corridors and crucial wildlife habitats in the West, and conserve these lands-and the vast wildlife species that depend upon them-for future generations." The Oregon map (<http://www.westgov.org/wga/initiatives/corridors/maps/> and click on OR.wildlife-2.pdf) created by this report shows that the exact area under consideration for the Goal 5 proposal has been deemed to be highly sensitive and sensitive wildlife corridor habitat.

Since this report is already in existence, I could not understand why the lawyer for the wind turbine developer said that the necessary analysis and collection of information to establish the significance of the acreage under consideration hasn't been done. Isn't elimination of duplication in government a major national goal these days? The WGA report has already established the significance of this site.

Because of the findings of the WGA report, I also do not support the elimination of the designation of the Energy Generating Area (EGA) near Athena as requested of the Energy Facility Siting Council by Umatilla County. The purpose of the EGA is to address the cumulative effects of wind turbines on wildlife. All of Oregon should be held to this standard of review, not just Umatilla County.

Please take a look at the many issues beyond the spectacular views of the Blues and attend the next meeting of the Planning Commission this Thursday, Aug. 27 at the Pendleton Convention Center at 6:30 p.m.

**Katrina Dielman Susi
Pendleton**

EDITOR'S NOTE: The Umatilla County Planning Commission meeting scheduled for Thursday has been cancelled.

Letters policy

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