



February 16, 2010

Oregon

## Consultants' study touts benefits of wind farm plan

Written by Bill Rautenstrauch, The Observer, [www.lagrandeobserver.com](http://www.lagrandeobserver.com) 16 February 2010

The company hoping to build a second wind farm in Union County says annual revenues to local governments from both facilities would range between \$2.7 and \$6 million.

Not only that, the two winds farms combined will account for more than 300 construction jobs and more than 90 direct, indirect and induced jobs.

But not everybody is buying it.

Horizon Wind Energy opened the 101-megawatt Elkhorn Valley wind farm at Telocaset in 2007. The company has applied to the Oregon Department of Energy to build a 300-megawatt facility, the Antelope Ridge Wind Farm, near Union in 2011.

Citing a study done recently by the economic consulting firms Pareto Global and ECONorthwest, Horizon said the two facilities combined will have significant long-term benefits to the local economy.

“Our modeling showed that wind farms have a positive economic impact, create job growth and increase revenue to local governments,” said Jules Bailey, the principal consultant for Pareto Global.

The study estimated that Elkhorn Valley created 150 construction jobs, and says that 15 people are employed at the facility now.

The work of maintaining and operating the facility has indirectly created another 24 jobs, the study says.

Also according to the study, revenue impact to Union County and other local governments from Elkhorn Valley is estimated at \$664,000 a year.

The study says Antelope Ridge would create about 165 construction jobs and 20 full-time jobs at the facility after construction.

In addition, the study claims the facility will indirectly create 32 more jobs and that revenue impact from the wind farm itself and resulting economic activity to governments will be about \$2 million.

The proposed Antelope Ridge facility has stirred much controversy in the county. Some individuals and at least one local government — the City of Union — have expressed concerns about possible effects on real estate values, scenery, tourism, wildlife and more.

Dennis Wilkinson, head of the local effort to stop construction of Antelope Ridge, sharply disputed claims made in the study.

In a letter to Horizon, Wilkinson said a release about the study sent to news outlets was “full of spin and incorrect information.” He accused Horizon of having a policy of not providing facts.

Among other things, Wilkinson asked Horizon to document its claims about job creation and revenue impacts.

“These quotes of dollar revenue and job claims are exaggerated to put it mildly and it continues to be the policy of Horizon to attempt to fool the public about the wind projects,” he said.

“It is a proven fact by hundreds of reports that wind farms are inefficient and would not be built if not for the subsidy and all the tax write-off.”

Horizon consultant Bob Applegate said Monday that the study’s conclusions are based on economic models.

He said the amount of money Horizon spends on construction, operation and maintenance is the primary factor. Outside of direct employment, the Pareto study did not pinpoint employment at local companies.

Applegate said that direct jobs are jobs held by workers at a facility. Indirect jobs are jobs at businesses that support operation and maintenance, and induced jobs are those created at businesses like restaurants and retail stores.

“It is a fair thing to say that absent the wind farm, there would be fewer jobs,” he said.

Applegate said that Horizon employs two full-time workers at Elkhorn, with plans to add a third. He said turbine manufacturer Vestas employs 12 people at Elkhorn.

Applegate also said that the study’s estimate of revenue impacts to governments is broad because those impacts depend on what agreements are worked out.

He said that if Horizon reaches a Strategic Investment Program agreement with Union County, the smaller figure would apply.

“I think it’s fair to say that the revenue impact to the county would be at least \$2.7 million,” he said.

He said Horizon and Union County are currently in negotiations regarding an SIP agreement.

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