



August 2, 2009

Oregon

County asks to discard designation

Umatilla County leaders are petitioning to have more control over wind project development in a 300,000-acre box near Athena known as the Energy Generating Area (EGA).

At a meeting of the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council Friday, Umatilla County Planning Director Tamra Mabbott and County Commissioner Larry Givens asked the council to eliminate the EGA, which is an oddity in Oregon. Unlike elsewhere in the state, wind developers with a project over a few megawatts in the EGA must be reviewed by the Energy Facility Siting Council. Normally, the council is required to handle only those projects that will generate 105 megawatts or more. The rest are only required to get county approval

The council designated the EGA in 1999 in response to a legislative mandate. It appears that its original purpose was to provide a mechanism for the council to monitor the cumulative effects of a large number of small projects in a wind-rich area, although the legislative language is “as clear as mud,” in the words of Councilor W. Bryan Davis. For unknown reasons, the council never created another EGA.

Mabbott and Givens argued that the EGA in Umatilla County has caused a number of problems and it unfairly singles out the county for a purpose that everyone agrees is ambiguous at best.

“I feel like sometimes this (the EGA) causes a triangulation between state and county governments and local citizens,” Givens said. “They want answers and they want to go to one source.”

Also, without the EGA, Givens said, the county would have more control over wind development in the area.

In an interview, Mabbott said the EGA has discouraged wind development in the area because Energy Facility Siting Council review is generally lengthier and more expensive than review by the county planning department. The county is required to hold to the same standards as the council, including those standards that address cumulative effects, Mabbott added.

Givens said that citizens also feel there is a better avenue for public input on a project if the review happens locally.

A lawyer for the Oregon Natural Desert Association, Chuck Barker, spoke in favor of the EGA, and encouraged the council to decline Umatilla County’s request and establish EGAs in other

counties. The EGA is a valuable tool to address the cumulative effects of wind turbines on wildlife, particularly birds, he said.

Barker pointed to one species, the Western Sage Grouse, which has declined “precipitously” in Oregon. Last year, the sage grouse’s population in the state was lower than at any time in the past 50 years. The remaining habitat of the sage grouse overlaps closely with wind resources, he said.

“The Energy Generating Area is a concept that ought to be spread through the state rather than quickly removed from the one place it is established,” he said.

To eliminate the EGA in Umatilla County, the council must go through a lengthy rulemaking process, including a public comment period and hearings.

The next meeting of the Energy Facility Siting Council will be Sept. 11 in Hood River.

By Erin Mills

[The East Oregonian](#) ^[1]

2 August 2009

URLs in this post:

[1] The East Oregonian:

<http://eastoregonian.com/main.asp?FromHome=1&TypeID=1&ArticleID=96067&SectionID=13&SubSectionID=48>

This article is provided as a service of [National Wind Watch](#), Inc.

<http://www.wind-watch.org/news/>

The use of copyrighted material is protected by [Fair Use](#).