

Hood River News

VIEWPOINT

Saturday, June 6, 2009

ANOTHER VOICE

Support well-planned energy development

By PETER CORNELISON

Renewable energy development is important to fulfilling our future energy needs and reducing greenhouse gas emissions that contribute to global warming.

Unfortunately, the Whistling Ridge wind turbine project proposed by SDS Lumber Company in eastern Skamania County is a poorly planned project that would result in adverse impacts to forest land, wildlife habitat, birds, scenic resources and nearby property owners.

Large wind energy developments on an industrial scale have the potential to harm wildlife habitat, kill many birds and bats, mar scenic vistas, destroy forests and impact the quality of life of surrounding property owners. Just like any large-scale industrial use, it is critical to plan these projects to avoid harm to other resources and to continue the public support for renewable energy development.

The Whistling Ridge proposal involves up to 80 turbines; each unit

is 426 feet tall, placed on a forested ridgeline along the boundary of the National Scenic Area near Underwood Mountain. The project is proposed within a state-designated "Northern Spotted Owl Special Emphasis Area."

Approximately hundreds of acres of forested habitat would be denuded, resulting in permanent habitat loss for many forest-dependent species including the northern goshawk and northern spotted owl, listed as "threatened" under state and federal law. The area will be transformed from a coniferous forest environment to an industrial landscape.

It is well-known that poorly planned wind energy projects can result in thousands of bird fatalities. For example, monitoring data from the Big Horn wind energy project in Klickitat County has revealed that bird mortality from this project far exceeds the initial estimates, with up to 16 times more raptor fatalities than expected.

A total of 704 birds, 446 bats and

49 raptors are killed per year. That is why it is so important to avoid important bird areas and migratory flight paths when siting these projects.

The scenic impacts of the Whistling Ridge project would be enormous. The southern half of the project would be visible for miles up and down the Gorge. Its 400-foot-tall turbines and flashing warning lights along the Gorge's northern ridgeline would be a constant reminder of industrial development intruding into natural forest habitat.

Members of the public can learn more about this topic by visiting one of the following Web sites:

www.EFSEC.wa.gov

www.saveourscenicarea.org

www.gorgefriends.org

You can also contact me at: peter@gorgefriends.org for more information on how to get involved.

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