



Department of Energy

Bonneville Power Administration
1520 Kelly Place
Walla Walla, Washington 99362

October 22, 2001

In reply refer to: PTS/Walla Walla

To: People Interested in the Maiden Wind Farm

Washington Winds Inc. is proposing to build a new wind energy facility north of Prosser in Benton and Yakima Counties, Washington. Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to purchase some or all of the electrical output from the project and provide transmission on its existing lines. This letter summarizes comments we received in June and July when the project was first announced and we held a meeting in Prosser.

Proposed Project

Washington Winds proposes to build and operate a wind generation facility on mostly private land north of Prosser, Washington (see attached map). The facility would have the capacity to generate from 150 up to 494 megawatts (MW) of power (one MW of wind power can provide electricity for 250 homes).

There is a relationship between the number, height, and spacing of turbines: as the size of turbines increases, the spacing between them increases, and the number needed decreases. Washington Winds has not yet chosen the turbine models, so exact numbers, distances, and heights are not yet known. The range of turbine designs being considered would produce from 900 to 2,000 kilowatts of power each (1000 kilowatts is equal to one MW). If the largest turbines were used, 75 to 247 turbines would be needed; with the smaller turbines, 167 to 549 would be needed. Turbines would be placed in strings (or rows) with 250 to 450 feet between each turbine in a string. The total turbine height, including the rotor blades, would be from 246 to 390 feet tall.

Power from the turbines would be collected by underground and overhead electric cables. The first 150 MW would be transmitted to a 4-acre substation located near BPA's transmission lines that cross the project area. If full build-out occurs, a second substation in the eastern portion of the study area would be built, and a 4-mile transmission line would be constructed to connect to one of BPA's transmission lines. The power would then be transferred to either the Hanford-John Day 500-kilovolts (kV) or the Midway-Big Eddy 230-kV transmission line. The project could also connect some of its power to BPA's Midway-Grandview 115-kV transmission line, which runs just west of the project area.

The project would require 18 to 60 miles of access roads and one to three operation and maintenance facilities. Washington Winds would like to begin construction in spring or summer of 2002, with commercial operation starting in late 2002. The project would operate for at least 20 years.

Environmental Analysis

As a Federal agency, BPA must study the environmental impacts, both adverse and beneficial, of this proposed project before it can take action. This policy is set out in the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 that requires potential environmental impacts of a proposed action to be made public before decision-making. Environmental impacts will be discussed in an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The EIS will also satisfy the requirements of the Washington State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA).

Public Comments

In June we asked for comments on the proposal to help us develop the environmental study. We held a public meeting, and asked people to phone, write, or e-mail any comments. We received 26 written responses as well as comments received at the public meeting. In all, over 300 comments covering all aspects of the project and the EIS were received. People generally supported wind power, but wanted to know more about this project and how it works in the regional energy system.

Sixty-five comments sought information about the proposed project and BPA's role. For example, people asked if wind power is economical; if the power would be sold to California; and if the project would affect any of the natural gas plants planned in the region. Questions about ownership of land where the project would be built, and whether the turbines would be removed after their useful life were also heard.

Environmental topics attracted 125 comments. The category receiving most comments was vegetation and wildlife. Of particular interest was how the project would affect birds and elk, the introduction of noxious weeds, and the loss of shrub steppe habitat. BPA, in consultation with the US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, originally planned a three-season avian study to help assess potential impacts to birds in the project area. As a response to comments received, BPA will continue the avian studies through the fourth season (winter).

Socioeconomic issues received 23 comments focusing on benefits to the local economy through jobs, property taxes, and landowner benefits. The EIS will include an analysis estimating income to counties from increased property taxes, and local employment numbers and duration.

Eleven comments were received on the visual impacts of the project. Most were concerned that the project would "ruin the view." Visual simulations are being developed and will be included in the EIS.

How We Use the Comments

All the comments we received will help shape the analysis in the EIS. The comments have helped us to identify the key issues to be addressed in the EIS, as well as the impacts of most concern. Everyone who commented has been added to the project mail list.

Project Schedule and Next Steps

Because we have decided to conduct a fourth season of avian studies, the EIS schedule has been extended. We plan to have a Draft EIS ready for public review in January. Please fill out and return the enclosed postcard to let us know if you would like to receive the entire EIS (around 250 pages), the summary (around 25 pages), or a copy by electronic mail. Even if you don't return the postcard, we will let you know when the Draft EIS is available.

If you have any questions about the proposal, please call me toll-free at 1-866-879-2303, call me direct at 509-527-6211, or send an e-mail to trosborn@bpa.gov. Thank you for your interest in our work.

Sincerely,

Thomas R. Osborn
Project Manager

Enclosures: Map
Postcard