

Cascade Wind

Developer: First Wind

Location: Wasco County, Oregon

Prepared July, 2008

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BACKGROUND

Cascade Wind is located on Sevenmile Hill, between The Dalles and Mosier in Wasco County, Oregon. This area is a part of the Columbia River Plateau region of northeast Oregon and southeast Washington. This region is (in general) sparsely populated and the major land use pattern is agricultural. However, over half of the county's residents (population: 23,712) live nearby in The Dalles (population: 12,520). The population density of Wasco County is 26 persons per square mile, but for The Dalles, the population density is about 1440 persons per square mile. In the 2000 census, the median household income in Wasco County was \$35,959 and the per capita income was \$17,195. The median household and per capita income in The Dalles were nearly identical at \$35,430 and \$17,511, respectively.

Cascade Wind, LLC is a subsidiary of First Wind, the Massachusetts based wind developer and operator. First Wind was formerly known as UPC Wind, and currently operates wind projects in Maine, New York, and Hawaii. Cascade Wind would connect to the Bonneville Power Administration's The Dalles—Hood River 115-kV transmission line that runs directly through



the proposed site.

The Cascade Wind project, as proposed, would have a capacity of 60 MW using 40 General Electric 1.5 MW SLE turbines with a total height of 389 feet. The project would disturb about 57 acres of privately held land and temporarily disturb 51 additional acres during construction and installation. It would not require the construction of any new high-voltage transmission lines.

First Wind is trying to brand the Cascade Wind project as a clean, local, and renewable energy source that will provide jobs to the local economy and tax revenues to help support public services. They believe the project will be beneficial to everyone involved. Despite these benefits, strong public opposition has arisen and the project has not moved past the initial application stage. Cascade Wind's first application was ruled incomplete by the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) and there was a Request for Additional Information (RAI). First Wind is currently preparing a redesigned proposal.

POLICY CONTEXT

Statewide energy policy in Oregon is favorable toward wind development. Oregon has a renewable portfolio standard which requires 25 percent of the state's electricity to come from renewable sources by 2025. The project is also expected to qualify as a Rural Renewable Energy Development Zone, which would provide property tax exemptions for the first three to five years of the project.

In Wasco County, an outdated land use ordinance covers wind energy siting, but only up to a maximum of 25 MW. Cascade Wind has been subject to the statewide regulations of the EFSC's Expedited Process for Small Capacity Facilities because its intermediate size (60 MW) was not covered by Wasco County's ordinance.

Because Cascade Wind falls under the jurisdiction of the EFSC, the project was required to complete an Application for

OTHER WIND PROJECTS ON THE COLUMBIA RIVER PLATEAU:

Project	County	Developer	Turbines	Status
Big Horn	Klickitat, WA	PPM Energy	133	Operating
White Creek	Klickitat, WA	Last Mile Electric Cooperative	89	Operating
Klondike I and II	Sherman, OR	PPM Energy	66	Operating
Klondike III (Phase 1)	Sherman, OR	PPM Energy	123	Operating
Biglow Canyon	Sherman, OR	Orion/P&G&E	225	Construction
Goodnoe East	Klickitat, WA	enXco/Power Holdings	47	Approved
Klondike III (Phase 2)	Sherman, OR	PPM Energy	85	Approved
Windy Point	Klickitat, WA	Windy Point Partners, LLC	97	Approved
Golden Hills	Sherman, OR	BP	267	Permitting
Miller Ranch Wind Energy	Klickitat, WA	Northwest Wind Partners LLC	49	Permitting



Visualization by Tetra Tech EC, Inc

Site Certification (ASC). This process required an analysis of visual, noise, and wildlife, as well as other environmental and social impacts that might be caused by the project. Cascade Wind hired Tetra Tech EC, an environmental consulting firm, to draft the ASC and perform four visual simulations of the proposed facility. Tetra Tech was required to draft a mitigation strategy for their visual and environmental impacts. Tetra Tech performed a Zone of Visual Influence analysis and evaluated the potential impact to key viewing areas as defined by local development and land management plans. They concluded that many areas would be impacted by Cascade Wind, but that none of the views would be significantly harmed.

PUBLIC RESPONSE

The public has strongly opposed the Cascade Wind Project from a large section of the surrounding community. Such diverse stakeholders as local homeowners, property rights advocates, conservation groups, and the local Audubon Society have all voiced serious concerns about the project's impacts. EFSC Chairman David Ripma even went so far as to say the response to the Cascade Wind project was the "most contentious" he had ever seen.

The EFSC's expedited siting process includes a number of public comment periods and public hearings to address concerns about the application and the project before the actual decision and subsequent opportunity for appeal. The EFSC received over 100 letters during the public comment period (only three of which were in favor of the project) and 31 of 35 speakers at the public meeting opposed the project. The most-cited concerns have been the impact of an "industrial" wind development on local residents' quality of life and safety, the visual impact on the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area, the impact to important wildlife habitat in Wasco Oaks, the impact on bats and birds (particularly on passerines and raptors migrating through the Gorge), and the possible cumulative effects of rapid, extensive, and ongoing wind development in the region.

Families for Sevenmile Hill, an organization of local homeowners opposed to the project, hosts an alternative set of visual simulations which are very crude in comparison to the official simulations. Their simulations do successfully underscore the point that there are many relevant viewpoints which were ignored by the official visual analysis. In addition to Families for Sevenmile Hill, there has been general and widespread engagement in the formal review processes. In their Request for Additional Information, the EFSC summarized the major concerns

voiced in the over 100 public comments they received, and reference multiple letters for most of these points. They went on to state that "the issues named in this letter are not a substitute for reading the actual comments, and we trust that you will review all of the public comments in their entirety."

One common theme among residents that expressed opposition was a support for renewable energy and even wind power in particular, but a belief that the Sevenmile Hill location was just not right for large-scale wind development. It is not fair to dismiss the resistance to Cascade Wind as strictly NIMBYism, as the residents raised many relevant concerns about wildlife, visual, and community impacts.

SUMMARY

It is too early to know whether this project is a success or a failure, as it is still ongoing and the developer is in the process of redesigning their proposal. It seems clear that the developer chose this site entirely for its wind resource and location next to a transmission line, without much regard for the adjacent National Scenic Area, private residences or the sensitive White Oak habitat which covers parts of the site. What is most surprising is that First Wind didn't engage the community on some of the more obvious concerns prior to expending substantial time and resources filing the ASC. They might have saved a lot of time and money by taking public comments themselves, conducting opinion surveys, and addressing specific concerns more thoroughly in their ASC. For a company that claims to be "working in partnership with communities", there has been a noticeable lack of communication between First Wind and the community outside of formal public meetings. It will be very interesting to see what their proposed redesign looks like and what approach it takes to addressing the concerns raised by the community.

For more information on this case, and on others, go to www.Macalester.edu/windvisual

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