

# Wild Horse

Developer: Horizon Wind Energy & Puget Sound Energy  
 Location: Kittitas County, Washington  
 Prepared July, 2008  
 For updates, see [www.macalester.edu/windvisual](http://www.macalester.edu/windvisual)

## PROJECT BACKGROUND

Wild Horse Wind Project (WHWP) is located on the ridges of Whiskey Dick mountain about 10 miles east of Kittitas and 15 miles east of Ellensburg in Kittitas County, Washington. This area is a part of the Columbia River Plateau region of northeast Oregon and eastern Washington. The county is sparsely populated (population: 37,189, density: 16 persons/square mile) and the major land use patterns are agriculture and forestry. In the 2000 census, the median household income in Kittitas County was \$32,546 and the per capita income was \$18,928.

Horizon Wind Energy developed WHWP and sold the Site Certification Agreement (SCA) to Puget Sound Energy (PSE) in August 2005. PSE then constructed, currently operates, and distributes the power from the project to its customers through PSE's Intermountain Power 115 kV transmission line. Horizon Wind was owned by Goldman Sachs at the time of development (it has subsequently been sold to EDP, a major Portuguese utility that focuses on renewable energy), and has developed wind projects throughout the United States. PSE is Washington's oldest and largest utility company. WHWP is PSE's second wind power facility and wind power currently makes up 2% of their power supply profile.

WHWP, as it is currently operating, has a capacity of 229 MW using 127 Vestas V80 1.8 MW turbines that reach a total height of 351 feet. The project area covers 8,600 acres of cattle rangeland, roughly 165 acres of which is disturbed by the turbines, access roads, collector lines, grid interconnection, and associated buildings. The project did not require the construction of any new high voltage transmission lines.

On their website, Horizon Wind branded the project as providing "affordable, pollution-free electricity to the Northwest," that has brought new jobs and substantial property tax revenues to Kittitas County. Furthermore, they write that the different parts of the project "blend well with other land uses" and the picture they display is of a wolf trotting through a snowy landscape filled with turbines. PSE's website stresses the new jobs and "more than \$2 million in tax revenue annually to the community," brought by the project. The project includes a 500 kW demonstration solar array and in April 2008, PSE opened their "Renewable Energy Center" at the site. Open to the public seven days a week from April to November, the Center includes



views of the entire facility, Mt. Rainier, Mt. Adams, Mt. Hood, and the Columbia River Basin to the east. Interpretive displays at the center, developed by Central Washington University, "lead visitors on a trail of discovery as they learn about the site and renewable energy."

## POLICY CONTEXT

Statewide energy policy in Washington is favorable toward wind development. Widespread public support for renewable energy led to a citizen-drafted ballot initiative that passed in 2006. I-937 requires public and private utilities in the state to provide 3% of their electricity from renewable sources by 2012 and 15% by 2020.

Kittitas County passed an ordinance in December 2002 that required any proposed wind development to gain approval of the Board of County Commissioners to rezone the site as a Wind Farm Resource Overlay Zone in addition to obtaining the necessary Development Agreement from the County Commissioners. In 2007, amid controversy surrounding Kittitas Valley Wind and Desert Claim Wind, two other proposed projects in the county, the Board of Commissioners pre-defined approximately 500 square miles of the county as a Wind Farm Resource Overlay Zone, indicating that the area was generally acceptable for wind development. WHWP had already been constructed and operating for over six months, and its site fell within the pre-defined area. Since then, one project (Vantage Wind) has been proposed within that zone and was recently approved.

Because Horizon chose to develop WHWP under the jurisdiction of the Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC), they were subject to its permitting process which includes an application for a Site Certification Agreement (SCA), followed by a public meeting, a land use hearing, an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), and a permit review. The Council then makes a recommendation to the Governor, who holds the final power to approve or deny the project (with the

## WIND PROJECTS IN KITTITAS COUNTY:

Project	Location	Developer	Turbines	Status
Vantage Wind	Vantage	Invenergy	69	Approved
Kittitas Valley	Cle Elum / Ellensburg	Horizon	65	Approved
Desert Claim	Ellensburg / Thorp	enXco	90	Permitting



Visual simulation, from Horizon Wind Energy

possibility of review by the state Supreme Court).

As a part of the Draft EIS, the EFSEC commissioned Jones & Stokes to perform a Zone of Visual Influence study and to prepare visual simulations of the most likely scenario as well as alternatives from six viewing locations. A night-time photo of the nearby Nine Mile Canyon Wind Farm was also included to provide a sense of what the impact of lighting would be. The Final EIS included changes that had been made to the site plan due to FAA regulations and revised simulations from the two original viewing locations that were affected by those changes.

## PUBLIC RESPONSE

Public response to the WHWP has been mixed, but not highly contentious compared to other large wind projects in the region. The EFSEC only received 32 public comments on the Draft EIS, many of which were in support of the project. Helen Wise, a local retiree, commented in her letter: "I came to this valley 51 years ago when my boys were five and seven. I knew we had been blessed that life had brought us to such a beautiful and majestic country. Wind turbines will not destroy such grandeur; rather, turbines will be monuments to the wind which is, in part, created by the mountains and valleys to our northwest. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder and, therefore, is not subject to mitigation for many opponents." She goes on to clarify that she would get no material gain from the project and supports it out of environmental concerns.

There was a public hearing on the completeness of the Draft EIS where a few citizens voiced concerns about the impact the project might have on wildlife and recreation within and around the site. The most contentious issue seemed to be the possibility that a private road within the project site might be closed to public access and that hunting within the site would be restricted. Even those people citing these concerns were generally still in favor of the project. The strongest letter of opposition came from the Kittitas Audubon Society, whose concerns ranged from general impacts on raptors, passerines, and bats to the specific case of Sage Brush Steppe habitat and

the impact of the project on the Sage Grouse. The developers preserved 600 acres of Sage Grouse habitat within the project boundaries in a conservation easement. The Society also voiced concerns over the cumulative effects of wind development in Kittitas County and the Columbia River Plateau, arguing that the state was neglecting its oversight duties by only considering the other projects in the county as alternatives in the Draft EIS, when in reality they are likely to be cumulative.

## SUMMARY

The WHWP can be classified as a successful project. In a county where there has been contentious resistance to other proposed wind projects, WHWP achieved widespread public support before the permit was approved and construction began. The project site has become a renewable energy testing ground of sorts, with the state's first large-scale solar power demonstration project installed in early 2008, including the first solar panels manufactured in the state. Moreover, the fact that PSE has gone so far as to build an information center to encourage visitors indicates that the company views the project as a success.

On July 8, 2008, PSE announced it was requesting an amendment to the Site Certification Agreement that would allow for 25 additional turbines to be added to the project. It remains to be seen how the proposed expansion will be received in the county. The site is within the pre-zoned Wind Farm Resource Overlay Zone, but there has been concern about the cumulative effects of wind development.

Perhaps the most interesting facet of this case study is that it has been so successful and that the Board of County Commissioners, in the face of controversy over further wind development, managed to find an area that was generally acceptable to both wind developers and residents of the county that could be designated as a Wind Farm Resource Overlay Zone. Why has Wild Horse been so successful when other projects in this same county have met staunch resistance? Ed Garrett, the spokesman for Residents Opposed to Kittitas Turbines, a group opposed to two other wind projects in the county, is quoted in a news story on Horizon's website: "Our hope has always been that they put wind farms out where people don't live, where there are fewer impacts. The two people who live near the Wild Horse project support it. Wild Horse has all the good points going for it."

For more information on this case, and on others, go to

[www.maclester.edu/windvisual](http://www.maclester.edu/windvisual)

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