

Tri-City lawmaker's bill to limit WA wind turbine lights goes too far, critics say

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KENNEWICK, WA

The 2,000 wind turbines already standing in Washington state should not be required to install systems that limit their blinking red lights at night, said supporters of renewable energy at a legislative hearing Friday.

But they did not object to requiring new wind power projects, such as the one [proposed just south of the Tri-Cities](#), to install systems that turn on lights only when aircraft flying at low elevations are near.

[House Bill 1173](#), sponsored by Rep. April Connors, R-Kennewick, would require both new and existing turbines at wind power farms in Washington to be equipped with Aircraft Detection Lighting Systems that meet Federal Aviation Administration standards.

The systems would turn on flashing red lights on turbines when low-flying aircraft are near and then turn them off when they are safely passed.

The House [passed the bill 94-1](#) last month, and it had its first Senate hearing on Friday before the Senate Committee on Environment, Energy and Technology.

The proposed legislation comes as Scout Clean Energy is proposing the Horse Heaven Clean Energy Center along the ridgeline from south of the Tri-Cities to south of Benton City. The project could have up to 244 wind turbines.



Rep. April Connors

Jeff Gombosky, representing [Renewable Northwest](#), said that the requirement for lights that only turned on when needed would be a significant barrier to renewable energy.

He asked that the bill be revised to apply only to new projects and to existing projects when they are being retrofitted for other reasons.

Spencer Gray, executive director of the [Northwest and Intermountain Power Producers Coalition](#), said that wind projects had been built and financed to comply with existing FAA lighting regulations and some could face steep and unplanned costs if the bill passes without changes.

But Tri-Cities advocates who testified in favor of the bill and Connors disagreed.

Only restricting continuous night lighting on new wind projects would not be equitable to communities that have been living with wind turbines for 20 years, she said.

“While in Eastern Washington we don’t always have a say in where they (wind projects) are sited, we do enjoy our night skies,” she said.

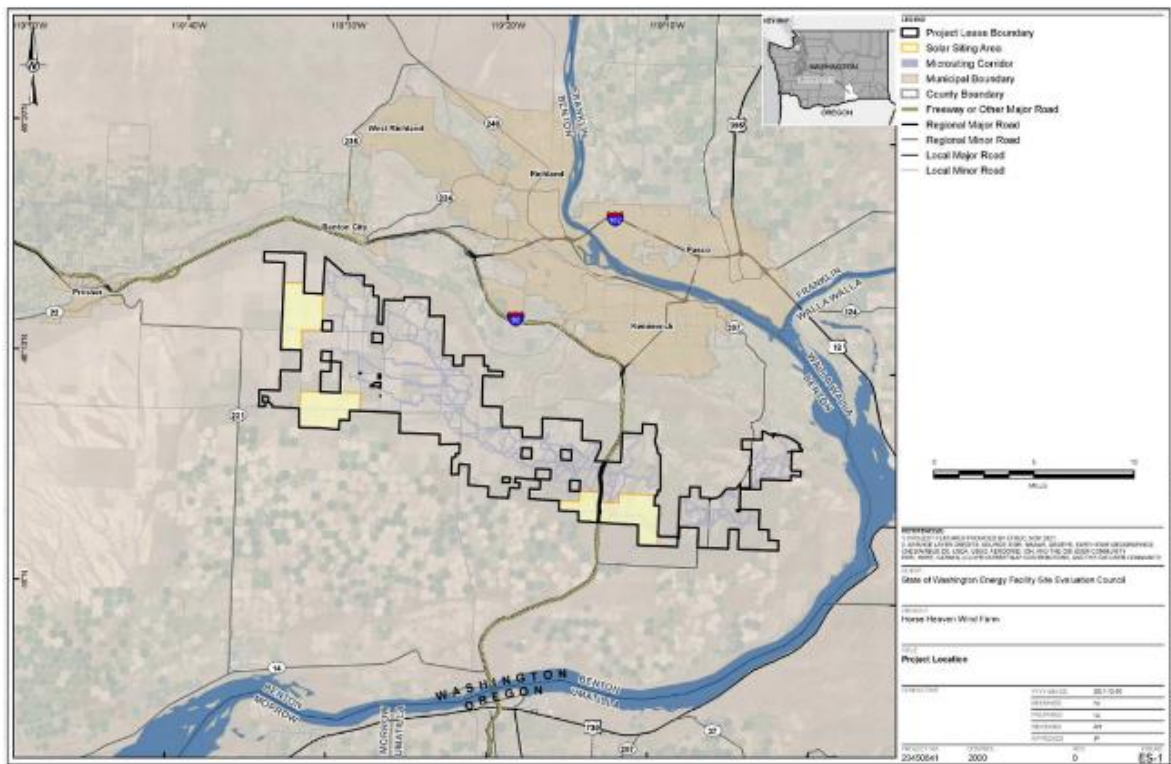
The wind turbine lights would cost less than 1% of the entire cost of a wind power project, said James Conca, a Richland scientist.

If lights were only activated when low-flying aircraft were near they would be on only 2% to 3% of the time, he said.

“These folks are making tons of money on these projects, most of which goes out of state, so they can certainly do something for the people of this state who are bearing the burden and getting almost none of the benefit,” Conca said.

Paul Krupin, a Kennewick scientist and attorney, said that while the lights are important for pilots, they are a “real eyesore.”

“They are an intrusive, disturbing nuisance that goes on all night,” he said.



The boundary of the proposed Horse Heaven Clean Energy Center south of the Tri-Cities is shown. Solar arrays could be in the yellow areas of the map. *Environmental Facility Site Evaluation Council*

The Horse Heaven wind farm is proposed to be built with in six miles of the homes of more than 100,000 people, he said. More than 250,000 people living in Benton and Franklin County will [see the wind turbines](#), he said.

Limiting the amount of time that those people see blinking red lights at night would increase social acceptance of wind farms, he said.

The bill must pass out of the committee to be considered by the full Senate.