

LOCAL

WA Gov. Inslee signs bill limiting wind turbine lights. But he vetoes local control

BY ANNETTE CARY

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OLYMPIA, WA

Wind turbine farms in Washington state will be required to turn their blinking red lights off at night when no low-flying aircraft are near after [Gov. Jay Inslee signed](#) the requirement into law Tuesday.

The bill will take effect July 1 for new wind farms.

Existing wind farms in Washington with at least five or more turbines must apply to the Federal Aviation Administration by Jan. 1, 2028, for approval of a lighting system that detects approaching aircraft and have it installed within two years of approval.

[Rep. April Connors, R-Kennewick](#), who sponsored the bill, was concerned that Inslee would veto it.



Rep. April Connors

The bill eventually had support from Energy Northwest, PacifiCorp and Puget Sound Energy, she said. But other clean power organizations and companies were lobbying against the bill, which would increase their wind farm costs, she said.

Inslee told her during a visit to the Tri-Cities last week, at which he signed other bills, that he would call her if there were any problems with the bill, Connors said.

So she was surprised when the governor vetoed two sections of the bill Tuesday without discussing it with her, she said.

WASH. BILL SECTION VETOES

One was an emergency clause that would have the bill take effect immediately. Connors said the governor had canceled emergency clauses in other bills this session.

The other section the governor vetoed would have provided counties in the state some local control.

It would have given county commissioners authority to establish the amount of light pollution that would be allowed, whether it was with new technology approved in the future by the FAA or deciding that a wind farm in a remote area did not need to reduce its light pollution.

Inslee said as he signed the bill that he was looking forward to discussing options that might be needed to support wind farm developers with retrofitting lights.

“I wasn’t super excited to have those section vetoes, but I am extremely happy we got this passed,” Connors said.

[House Bill 1173](#) as signed will require turbines at wind power farms in Washington to be equipped with aircraft detection lighting systems that meet Federal Aviation Administration standards.



Scout Clean Energy plans a wind farm on Benton County farm land south of the Tri-Cities along the Horse Heaven Hills ridgeline south of Badger Road.

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 new requirement for wind farms ensures “wind farms are good neighbors and minimizes light pollution for communities,” the governor read as he signed the bill.

Several other sites already require FAA-approved devices that use sensors to detect approaching aircraft and then turn on turbine lights for their safety.

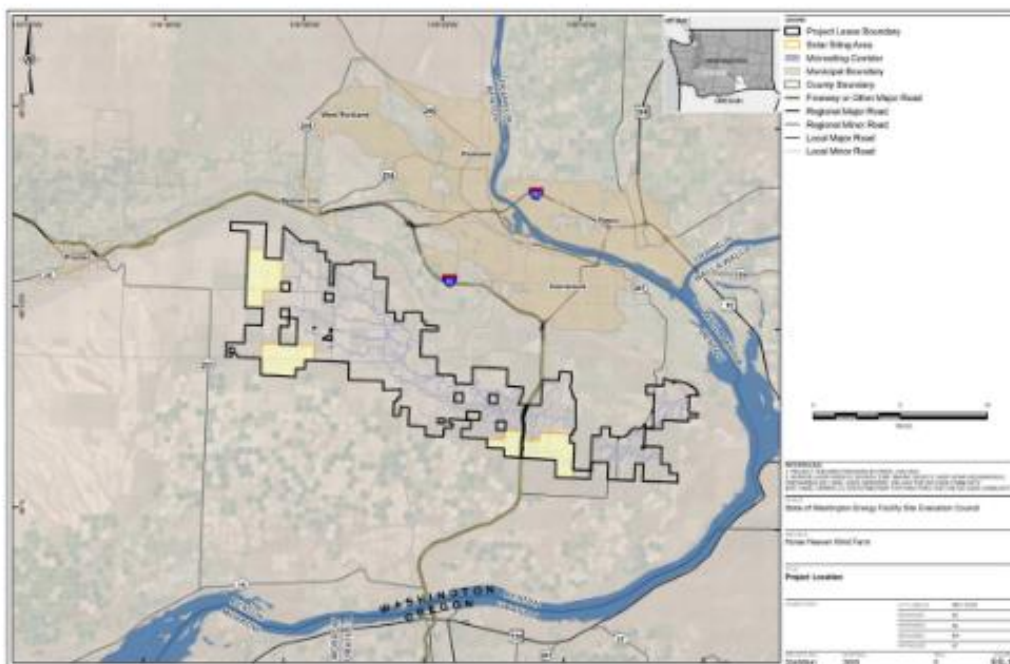
Paul Krupin, a Kennewick scientist and attorney, said at a legislative committee hearing that the bill could reduce at least somewhat public opposition to nearby wind turbines. It also could diminish the perceived risks of harm to property values and tourism, he said.

WIND FARM PROPOSED BY KENNEWICK

Krupin, along with key members of [nonprofit Tri-Cities CARES](#), or Community Action for Responsible Environmental Stewardship, met with Connors to suggest a turbine lighting law for Washington state.

The wind turbine lights would cost less than 1% of the entire cost of the Horse Heaven Clean Energy Center wind farm, said James Conca, a Richland scientist, speaking at House and Senate committee hearings before the bill passed.

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

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Scout Clean Energy is proposing up to [244 wind turbines](#) stretching along the Horse Heaven Hills from south of Finley to south of Benton City.

At a minimum they would be 500 feet tall, or an alternate plan would have 150 turbines extending about 670 feet tall.

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

Connors' bill passed the House and Senate with just one member in each opposed. She credited Sen. Matt Boehnke, R-Kennewick, with helping win support in the Senate, and then support from Democrats in the Senate and House to help convince the governor to sign the bill.