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GUEST OPINIONS

These Tri-Citians say WA council is steamrolling Horse Heaven wind project / Opinion

BY TRI-CITIES C.A.R.E.S

JUNE 09, 2023 9:48 AM



Scout Clean Energy plans a 60,000-acre wind farm on Benton County farm land south of the Tri-Cities along the Horse Heaven Hills ridgeline south of Badger Road. This view from the Reata Road overpass across Interstate 82 faces southwest towards Benton City. BOB BRAWDY *Tri-City Herald* file

As air-breathing inhabitants of the planet, we are concerned about climate change and support the idea of clean energy. Powering our phones, TVs, and air-conditioning with this energy is, therefore, very appealing.

Tri-City CARES's board members, a retired environmental protection specialist, a retired electrical engineer and wind project manager, a retired principal, and a retired project manager, all avid outdoor recreationists, all also believe that some locations are clearly not appropriate and should be off-limits to certain energy developments. The Horse Heaven Hills Wind and Solar Project is one of them.

We do not believe this project is good for the Tri-Cities or Washington State. The developer has not proven the benefits outweigh the costs and impacts to Washington

This project's all-or-nothing proposal; to build 244, 499-foot high wind turbines stretching over 25 miles across the ridgeline of the Horse Heaven Hills, significantly and negatively impacts wildlife, cultural resources, recreation, economics, and people.

The developer is proposing far more capacity than can be connected to the power grid. No reasonable alternatives have been proposed that could eliminate the most offensive turbines – an accommodation that could be easily made.

Some people have been seduced by the project, thinking that it will provide 900 jobs and help the economy. But in reality, there will only be 250 local jobs and just during the short construction periods, with only 20 permanent positions. On close examination, the economic benefits are far less and the environmental, economic, and social impacts are far greater than proclaimed.

The developer fails to establish a feasible purpose and need for the project. They do not even try to explain or justify the project with any analysis of greenhouse gases impacts. The project is only financially feasible because your tax dollars are subsidizing it.

Over 100,000 people live within six miles of the project boundary. The visual impact of having an industrial energy complex in plain view all the time will make the idea of living in Tri-Cities less desirable. Thousands of homeowners could face property value reductions based on the proximity and visual impact of the turbines. Home, property, and business sales will be hurt if prospective buyers take one look and decide to go somewhere else. Future growth and development will be impacted.

Building this project is going to require at least 220,000 gallons of water per day for dust control and construction. That means an armada of 40 to 50, 5,000-gallon trucks driving from the Port of Walla Walla on I-182/82, Highways 395 and 397, and county roads each day for several months each year during construction and beyond. We already live in a dusty place – this project will make it much worse.

The Energy Facilities Siting Evaluation Council (EFSEC) – the “one-stop” shop created over 50 years ago is steamrolling this project through an accelerated adjudication and decision process to support a panic-driven goal without any real justification. EFSEC, on their official tour last November, never set foot on the project. Chair Kathleen Drew denied requests to hold the hearings in the Tri-Cities. The Final EIS date is unknown, yet the adjudication process proceeds. How can anyone analyze the specific impacts of a project when no one really knows what project specifications really are?

EFSEC is failing to fulfill its obligation to balance the need for this project with the interests of the public and the impact on the environment and people. The Horse Heaven Hills are being mined for commercial profits derived from tax credits and not helping save the planet in the slightest.

The battle is on and we are fighting to protect Tri-Cities from this poorly conceived and poorly sited project.

We and our children will bear the brunt of this flawed decision-making process and will be paying the price for this folly for many decades to come.

Board Members on behalf of TRI-CITIES C.A.R.E.S

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Dave Sharp
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