

# Eco-group challenges wind farm approval

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A group opposed to wind development has challenged the Umatilla County Planning Commission approval of the 99-megawatt Chopin Wind Project to be built between Milton-Freewater and Athena.

Blue Mountain Alliance, a Milton-Freewater-area group that seeks protection for the Blue Mountain viewscape and for wildlife habitat, filed its appeal Nov. 4. The county scheduled a hearing on it Monday, Nov. 28.

The commission Oct. 10 approved the 33-turbine wind farm, a project of Windkraft Nord, a German firm with a U.S. subsidiary. On Thursday the commission is scheduled to decide on siting the power line that will feed energy from the wind farm into the regional grid.

The commission applied an older set of regulations with more liberal setback requirements when it approved the Chopin Wind Project permit. Windkraft Nord first submitted its paperwork in February. Oregon law tells the commission to follow the rules in place at that time.

In June the county adopted new wind-farm siting rules, including a 2-mile setback between homes and turbines.

To satisfy objections, the commission required Windkraft Nord to abide by state sound rules, keeping the noise below 36-decibels for people living nearby.

But Blue Mountain Alliance contends the commission should have applied the new rules to the Chopin Wind Project because the company submitted the last of its paperwork in July and August, well after the new rules were adopted, according to its appeal.

Many Blue Mountain Alliance objections echo those it voiced during at hearings Sept. 29 and Oct. 10, before the commission approved the Windkraft Nord permit.

The group contends a study of background sound that Windkraft Nord submitted for the wind-farm site is flawed. Blue Mountain Alliance also claims the commission failed to enforce viewshed protections on Highway 204 — the Tollgate Highway overlooking the wind farm site — and challenges the cultural and socioeconomic impact studies the company submitted, according to its appeal.

Blue Mountain Alliance also claims Windkraft Nord did not consider the effects on birds and bats by the Chopin project and other wind farms. Because no laws govern how all the wind farms together affect wildlife, the planning commission and other energy boards, like the Oregon Energy Facility Siting Council, are still trying to address cumulative effects. Each time a wind farm is proposed, only that specific project's effect on wildlife is considered.

### Timeline

- February 2011: Windkraft Nord seeks permit for Chopin Wind Project
- June 2011: Umatilla County imposes a 2-mile setback between turbines and homes
- Sept. 29 and Oct. 10: Umatilla County Planning Commission holds hearings on permit application
- Oct. 10: Commission approves a conditional-use wind-farm permit
- Nov. 4: Blue Mountain Alliance appeals that decision.
- Nov. 17: Planning commission expected to decide power-line route
- On Nov. 28: Public hearing scheduled on Blue Mountain Alliance appeal

Six other wind farms are sited in the same area where the Chopin Wind Project is planned. A portion of the planned Helix Wind Project site is also nearby.

The Chopin Wind Project is planned for the area between Pine Creek and Lower Dry Creek, between Staggs and Ferguson roads. The site is northeast of Athena and southwest of Milton-Freewater.

For more information, or to review the Blue Mountain Alliance appeal, visit the county planning department web page. Go to [www.co.umatilla.or.us](http://www.co.umatilla.or.us) and click on the "Land Use Planning" tab on the left-side menu.