

Letter: Alliance seeks rules, not ban on wind projects

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A June 22 letter by Mr. Richard Stewart contained the following sentence. “The Blue Mountain Alliance has 1,400 signatures of people who don’t want any wind turbines in the county.”

Those 1,400 people signed a petition calling for the county commissioners to adopt the recommendations of the Umatilla County Planning Commission for improved siting standards for wind projects in the county. The proposed standards are not a “killer” for the wind industry in the county — though the wind developers want you to think they are.

A quick example: Wind developments must abide by Oregon noise control regulations, which, according to maps published for the Helix Wind Project would lead to approximately a 1.7-mile setback between three megawatt turbines and rural homes. That distance can be reduced if the homeowner signs a waiver. Even at 1.7 miles, the perceived loudness of ambient noise could double at the rural home — and that is allowed under the Oregon noise control regulations. The zinger is that a second wind project could come along and would be allowed to double the perceived loudness at that same rural home again. And there is more. A third wind project could come in and raise the perceived loudness yet again — though not a doubling this time.

The planning commission recommended a two-mile setback between turbines and rural homes (which could be reduced by the waiver process), and the county commissioners are considering adopting that standard. Note that a second or third project would have to observe the same easily confirmed rule (distance) — and citizens would not have to hire noise experts or lawyers to establish whether or not the siting standards have been met regarding noise (think about Morrow County).

The Blue Mountain Alliance has not been working to ban wind energy from Umatilla County. They have been working to support siting standards that are fair to the neighbors of wind energy projects as they expand into more settled areas.

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