

Wind Turbine Ban Proposed in Virginia

By Kenneth Artz

January 2nd, 2012

Floyd County, Virginia is considering banning structures taller than 40 feet on ridges within the county. Although the ordinance would apply to most structures, with several narrow exceptions, the proposed ban has been drafted in response to local concerns about potential siting of wind farms.

Residents Oppose Wind Farms

Nestled among the Blue Ridge Mountains in southwestern Virginia, Floyd County has several scenic ridges that wind power companies argue would make good locations for industrial wind farms. During county supervisor meetings, local residents have expressed strong opposition to any such wind farms.

Wayne Booth, a cattle farmer whose land provides breathtaking views of Willis Ridge, has collected more than 600 signatures from local residents opposing potential wind turbine placement on the ridge.

Lauren Yoder, a newly elected county supervisor, is struggling with the issue.

“I’m kind of a personal property rights guy,” Yoder told the *Roanoke Times*. “I’m leaning away from the ordinance right now.”

The proposed ordinance presents a dilemma for many property rights advocates. Very few wind farms would exist without market-disruptive subsidies and renewable power mandates. Nevertheless, the Floyd County ordinance would restrict private property rights.

Adding yet another twist, opposing the ordinance would thwart environmental opposition to wind farms after similar interests and groups have severely restricted much more economical conventional energy production.

Alarming Bird Deaths

Conservation groups worry about wind farms doing more than just despoiling scenic vistas. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service reports wind turbines kill 440,000 birds each year, including many protected and endangered species. The wind turbines also kill prodigious numbers of bats, which are important for insect control and plant pollination.

Ramping up the number of wind farms will similarly increase the number of bird and bat deaths above current kill numbers.

“Ironically, [wind farm] proponents often overlook the impact wind turbines have on the environment. Advocates of public policy that subsidizes or mandates the increased use of renewable energy and, in this case, wind energy, seem to have a ‘renewable energy at any cost attitude,’ ” said Todd Wynn, director of the Energy, Environment, and Agriculture Task Force at the American Legislative Exchange Council.

‘Free Pass’ to Kill

H. Sterling Burnett, a senior fellow at the **National Center for Policy Analysis**, agrees, noting wind turbines are known as “the Cuisinarts of the air.”

“If coal-fired, nuclear, or natural gas power plants killed federally protected golden eagles, they would be shut down. If you or I killed a federally protected species, we’d be thrown in jail. Yet for some reason, wind farms are given a free pass. This has been going on for more than 20 years now,” Burnett said.

HawkWatch International warns a single proposed wind farm project in Wyoming will cause 700 raptor deaths each year, including 200 golden eagle kills annually. With only 30,000 golden eagles in the entire United States, HawkWatch says wind power projects are rendering populations of the birds unsustainable.

A newly released U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service field report stated nearly 500 bird carcasses were discovered in a mere two-week span at the Laurel Mountain wind farm in West Virginia.

Wildlife groups point out carcasses found at the foot of wind turbines represent merely a fraction of the birds that killed by the machines. Other victims of turbine strikes aren’t killed immediately but die shortly after the birds have flown away to other locations.

Mice, Rats Safe to Thrive

In addition to the avian deaths, wind turbines create a safety zone for rodent breeding because birds of prey cannot patrol wind turbine areas. Communities in the vicinity of wind farms report disturbing spikes in the mouse and rat populations.

“They may figure out a way someday to prevent the wind turbines from killing birds, but the real problem is where you build the farms. In order for wind power to make sense, you have to build the turbines in areas where there is a lot of wind, and this just happens to be in the flight paths of migratory birds, which don’t just flap their wings to get where they’re going, they ride the thermal wind currents,” said **Burnett**.