

1/11/2012 Oral Testimony: Governor's Commission on Energy Generation Siting Policy

My remarks focus on wildlife.....the bobcat, fisher, bear....who are the best indicators of the ecological health of Vermont's landscapes.

I am a biologist and have a masters degree in natural resources. Today I am retired however for 30 years I worked in acquiring, designing and managing public natural areas in Vermont, trying to strike a balance of respect for park visitors and resident wildlife....so that both groups could peacefully coexist with one another. I've attended 4 of the commission's meetings. This is my 5th.

I would like to offer my perspective on two design restrictions to be placed on future ridgeline turbine projects as a condition of a proposal being considered. Please understand that any development of Vermont's ridges is a fundamental loss to critical wildlife habitat. I'd rather our state focus on energy conservation and increased efficiency and revisiting our frugal roots which is part of Vermont's culture to tackle global climate change, however if society is determined to develop its ridges for energy generation then I offer these two restrictions. They are very specific and my hope is they become a recommendation in the Commission's final report. Another avenue for action would be for people here in this audience to ask for them during the permitting process for new turbine proposals that appear destined to happen.

1. Demand that project designers look seriously at ways to reduce the footprint of impact on the ridgeline and its environs. Certainly only allow single-width roads. Helicopter in heavier equipment if feasible so the road base on the ridge needs not be so fortified, steep-sided, and wide. Minimize the footprint of turbine pads too. (Handout Exhibit A, photo of turbine pad in Spain.) In other words, specify that proposers must demonstrate how they have looked seriously at using technologies more common out west for remote areas, where drill rigs and heavy equipment are helicoptered in, rather than accepting as a given massive road building on Vermont's ridges.

2. Demand that the developer restrict motorized public access to the ridge, not only during construction but forever after. I am not talking about curbing existing uses. It's the new levels and new uses by people. The roads they build should not become public thoroughfares. It won't be possible to keep everyone away but less traffic...the occasional hikers, snowshoers...will probably be tolerated by wildlife....hopefully.

Before human settlement, bobcat, fisher and bear roamed Vermont's valleys more freely. Today the presence of people has pushed these species to higher, less developable, more remote areas, especially the higher elevations of its mountains and ridges. These have become the bobcat, fisher and bear's main travel corridors and will no doubt become increasingly important to these species in a warming world. Wind turbine farms access roads cut across and into this remaining habitat of our largest mammals. This impact can be minimized by reducing the footprint of disturbance to a minimum...so that craggy features so important to bobcat are left intact, the ridgeline still undulates forever less susceptible to erosion, and diverse forest remains intact as much as possible, helping us to fight global warming. We can't stop there though. Demand that those servicing the turbines also keep them and the ridges upon which they sit remote from people. Only then can we realistically hope that new ridgeline wind turbine projects can peacefully coexist with our wildlife.

Thank you.

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