



State of Washington
Department of Fish and Wildlife

Mailing Address: 600 Capitol Way N, Olympia WA 98501-1091, (360) 902-2200, TDD (360) 902-2207
Main Office Location: Natural Resources Building, 1111 Washington Street SE, Olympia WA

September 17th, 2010

Stephan Posner
EFSEC
905 Plum Street SE
Olympia, Washington 98504-3172
efsec@commerce.wa.gov

SUBJECT: Whistling Ridge Energy Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement: EFSEC Application 2009-01

Dear Mr. Posner,

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has reviewed the above-referenced documents and offers the following amended comments at this time. This letter replaces the previously submitted August 27th, letter from WDFW. Other comments may be offered as the project progresses.

WDFW has carefully reviewed the habitat evaluation prepared by the applicant. The Whistling Ridge site is a forested site managed for over 100 years. It is not in a natural or native coniferous forest condition. The pre-project assessment and avian/bat use surveys are consistent with standard protocols utilized throughout the U.S. and are consistent with the WDFW Wind Power Guidelines (WDFW 2009). Because the relationship between avian use and mortality has been reasonably consistent across other habitat types and locations, it is likely that the relationship between avian use and mortality would be similar to that evaluated in other projects. While no similar data exist for constructed wind energy projects in managed coniferous forest habitats that might help inform impact predictions for Whistling Ridge, as we previously confirmed in the attached letters, WDFW confirms that these data represent the best available science for predicting avian impacts at Whistling Ridge. Therefore, if the WRWRA is constructed, WDFW anticipates the opportunity to better understand the relationship between wind energy development in western coniferous forests and wildlife response.

WDFW would like to emphasize that fluctuations in raptor populations, as well as other avian species, may result in greater mortality than what is predicted in the *Final Report*. As a result, operational controls may be necessary to address avian mortality that exceeds predicted mortality.

In closing, WDFW would like to acknowledge that the applicant has submitted a preliminary mitigation plan that we are currently reviewing. This mitigation proposal was developed consistent with the WDFW Wind Power Guidelines at a 2:1 replacement ratio. The preliminary mitigation plan encompasses approximately 100 acres in Klickitat County 12 miles due east of the project site. The mitigation site is forested with Oregon White Oak with some Douglas fir and Ponderosa pine and shares a portion of its northern boundary with 40 acres of WDNR land and. This mitigation site provides habitat for several PHS entries including Western gray squirrels. Additionally, the site includes the fish-bearing Silva Creek, a tributary to the Klickitat River.

We look forward to working with applicant as this project moves forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Travis Nelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name being more prominent.

Travis Nelson
Renewable Energy Section Manager



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DEPARTMENT OF FISH AND WILDLIFE

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September 22, 2009

Mr. Jason Spadaro
SDS Lumber Company
Post Office Box 266
Bingen, Washington 98605

Dear Mr. Spadaro:

Thank you for your letter dated August 21, 2009, concerning the Whistling Ridge Energy Project. You requested clarification on several specific issues raised in correspondence from the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) on May 14, 2009, and June 11, 2009.

You are concerned that the letters from WDFW provided an incomplete and inaccurate analysis of wildlife data that has been collected for the proposed project since 2003, and that our conclusions regarding potential project impacts to birds and bats are unwarranted and unsubstantiated. It is my goal to provide clarification to our previous letters that will allow you to continue to develop your proposal for this wind power project, at Whistling Ridge, using our Wind Power Guidelines.

You raised concern of how receptive WDFW is to Best Available Science (BAS) and its application to the project. WDFW views BAS as an integral component of your project assessment, therefore, we will consider all current and future BAS related to your existing and future proposals and review the findings objectively. Your supplemental information concerning goshawks, spotted owls and other avian species and Western grey squirrel use of the project site that you included in your August 21 letter, fits this definition of BAS. We will use this information to refine our analysis of the impacts of this project. Our analysis will focus on current habitat conditions and species presence. We will also treat any additional information you may submit in the future as BAS.

I acknowledge projections of post-construction bat mortalities that we made, that were based on pre-construction activity levels, are not necessarily a good predictor of numbers of post-construction mortalities; they only provide an indicator of relative risk, as documented at other wind farms around the country. Pre-construction activity levels are also important as a

Jason Spadaro
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guide to avoid and minimize collisions (post-construction) through the placement of the wind turbines, and to assess the potential length of post-construction fatality studies.

I am encouraged by your commitments to adaptive management for this project and am certain we will agree on a plan that will ensure that avoidance, minimization, and/or mitigation goals are met once the project is completed.

I look forward in working with you to get on track and to continue towards building a collaborative working relationship and to assist you in developing a proposal for the Whistling Ridge Energy Project that will be protective of wildlife.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Greg Hueckel". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large loop at the end.

Greg Hueckel Assistant Director
Habitat Program

cc: Governor Christine Gregoire
Phil Anderson, WDFW Director
Allen Fiksdal, EFSEC Siting Manager



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December 20, 2010

Al Wright
Manager - Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council
Washington Department of Commerce
PO Box 42525
Olympia, Washington 98504-2525

Mr. Wright:

The Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife (WDFW) has reviewed the proposed Whistling Ridge Energy Project (WREP) as it relates to impacts to fish and wildlife resources, consistent with the WDFW Wind Power Guidelines. The WREP is located in eastern Skamania County, approximately 7 miles northwest of the City of White Salmon. The project site encompasses approximately 1,152 acres of private, commercial forestry lands owned and managed by SDS Lumber. This site has been, and will continue to be, heavily influenced by commercial forest management activities.

The biological information in the environmental documentation for the proposed project identifies five habitat types that include grass-forb stand (522 acres), brushfield/shrub stand (103 acres), conifer-hardwood forest (310 acres), conifer forest (209 acres), and riparian deciduous forest (8 acres). Temporary and permanent impacts to these habitat types will result in approximately 115 acres in temporary (54 acres; 47%) and permanent (61 acres; 53%) impacts to grass-forb (54 acres; 47%), brush/scrub (12 acres, 10%), conifer-hardwood (29 acres; 25%), and conifer habitats (21 acres; 18%). There will be no impacts to riparian habitats. Additionally, in the *Draft EIS*, Chapter 7 Appendix C, *Vegetation Technical Report* (page 3) it states, "Few large, old conifer trees occur in the project area and there are no known late-successional or "old-growth" stands within or adjacent to the project area, though small groups of big trees occur."

Habitat and wildlife impact assessment and mitigation considerations relied on the 2009 WDFW Wind Power Guidelines page 2, *Guiding Principles*, to address potential impacts to wildlife and their habitats. Temporary and permanent impacts to habitat were addressed through page 8, Section 5.1, *General Principles for Habitat Mitigation* and page 19, Section 8.2, *Habitat Classification Mitigation Chart*.

The proposed development site is managed for timber production, and as such is classified per the Wind Power Guidelines as a commercial forestry operation. This type of habitat classification requires consultation between the project owner and WDFW to address mitigation.

The mitigation offered by the developer is consistent with the wind power guideline in that habitat mitigation is presumed to fully mitigate for habitat losses for all species. No old-growth forest occurs on the proposed project site and there is none on the mitigation site. Both the proposed project site and the mitigation site support a variety of habitats and wildlife species. WDFW understands that even though the proposed project site is a commercial forest, it also provides suitable habitats for a variety of wildlife species, some of which are high priority for WDFW. However, the mitigation site has not and will not be subject to the impacts associated with commercial forestry or wind energy operations.

At the proposed project site, no spotted owls were recorded during extensive multi-years surveys following standard protocols. While spotted owls also make use of habitats other than old-growth, the types of suitable habitat are typically not present over large areas on managed commercial forest lands. Additionally, the regular disturbances to the proposed project site as a result of commercial logging operations likely further reduces habitat suitability for spotted owls, as well as other native and migratory wildlife.

On the proposed development site, temporary and permanent impacts from turbine strings, collector lines, and some facilities will occur on managed forest lands and utilize, where practical, existing roads and cleared areas. The use of existing roads and cleared (disturbed) areas is typical of many wind energy developments except for safety or engineering considerations. Additionally, the use of these previously disturbed areas minimizes the project footprint, habitat fragmentation and habitat degradation. The Wind Power Guidelines encourage development to occur on disturbed lands to minimize impacts except where such lands host significant aggregations of wildlife or are used by state or federally listed species.

The developer has acquired mitigation habitat that will be protected by a conservation easement for the life of the project. While the Wind Power Guidelines recommend like-kind mitigation (e.g., shrub-steppe for shrub-steppe; forested for forested, grassland for grassland), the mitigation habitat for the proposed project is not a direct replacement (i.e. - like-kind) for the habitat lost through temporary or permanent impacts (i.e. - commercial forest for commercial forest). However, the Wind Power Guidelines recognized that in some cases like-kind mitigation may not be beneficial to habitats and wildlife and further recommends that mitigation of equal or higher habitat value than the impacted area may be acceptable.

The habitat qualities and wildlife species of the proposed mitigation parcel are high priority for WDFW. The parcel contains WDFW Priority Habitats such as Oregon white oak, riparian habitats, and a fish-bearing stream; Silva Creek, which is a tributary to the Klickitat River. The parcel also contains WDFW Priority Species such as western grey squirrel, western bluebird, Merriam's turkey, and black tail deer. While the proposed project site also supports priority species and habitats, it does so in the context as a commercial forestry operation.

In summary, the developer, SDS Lumber, in consultation with WDFW and through the Wind Power Guidelines, has developed an acceptable mitigation strategy for temporary and permanent impacts that will occur as a result of the Whistling Ridge Wind Energy Development. The proposed mitigation parcel of approximately 100 acres of land within a portion of the SE ¼ of

Al Wright
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Section 10, Township 3 North, Range 12 East is consistent with the WDFW Wind Power Guidelines.

Thank you for the opportunity to provide this input. If you have any questions or concerns regarding the content herein, please contact Mike Ritter at 509-543-3319 or Michael.Ritter@dfw.wa.gov.

Sincerely,



Travis Nelson
Renewable Energy Section Manager

cc: Jason Spadaro SDS Lumber
Stephan Posner EFSEC
Lisa Veneroso WDFW
Mike Ritter WDFW