



KLICKITAT COUNTY  
**BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS**



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November 23, 2010

Honorable Ed Schafer, Secretary of Agriculture  
U.S. Department of Agriculture  
14<sup>th</sup> & Independence Avenue  
Washington, D.C. 20250

Honorable Secretary Schafer:

Klickitat County, Washington, officially recognized as an economically distressed rural county, wishes to draw your attention to the difficulties it has experienced from costly legal appeals from special interest groups against development of renewable energy projects and other economic development efforts. We are appealing to you, as Secretary of Agriculture, to support renewable energy development, and other economic development projects designed to improve the lives and economic wellbeing of Klickitat County citizens.

Portions of Klickitat County, Skamania County, and Clark County in Washington State, along with portions of three Oregon counties, are located within the Columbia River Gorge. Much of the land bordering the River in the six counties is federally designated as the Columbia River Gorge National Scenic Area (NSA) with a host of regulations regarding land use. Renewable energy projects that are being targeted by the special interest groups are not within the restrictive boundary of the NSA. However, these projects are visible from the NSA boundary. Special interest groups are claiming projects outside the border that can be seen from the NSA border should be reviewed and regulated as if they were within the NSA. (Note: Section 17(a)(10), "Savings Provisions" of the NSA states "[t]he fact that activities or uses inconsistent with the management directives for the scenic area or special management area can be seen or heard from these areas shall not, of itself, preclude such activities or uses up to the boundaries of the scenic area or management areas.") This re-interpretation of NSA provisions, if it is allowed to stand, has potential to threaten any economic development projects (not just renewable energy development) within sight of the NSA border. This new interpretation could impact significant investments in wind projects proposed to be built outside the NSA. This matter has caused genuine concern for local leaders in Klickitat County and other counties.

Klickitat County has struggled for many years with economic setbacks such as closure of a large aluminum smelter in 2000 that meant the loss of some 900+ jobs and closure of a thriving lumber industry due to an environmental ruling to protect the Spotted Owl. These setbacks and more recent law suits brought by regional special interest groups have required the County to defend much needed economic development projects.

The wind energy projects already built and in operation in Klickitat County are generating much needed tax revenue for the county and for local taxing districts. The revenue is enabling rural communities to afford improved fire fighting equipment, ambulances, schools, museums and other public services/facilities. Unfortunately, the threat of legal appeals against project proposals serves to intimidate wind developers into paying costly mitigation settlements to allow them to construct their

already permitted projects. Recent appeal actions have directly impacted local land owners as a result of wind developers being coerced to reduce or eliminate the number of wind towers that can be placed on their land. These actions have impacted projects on lands outside the National Scenic Area boundary. This is a costly penalty imposed on citizens striving to support development of renewable energy projects.

The lawsuits filed to stop developments such as these have not been valid and have in certain cases been settled through costly mitigation agreements between the special interest groups protesting and private businesses paying to get their projects built, especially in the case of multi-million dollar wind energy projects. Rural landowners need assistance to protect them from such lawsuits and the hindrances they bring to economic development in this County. The most frustrating incident recently has been the matter of Federal agencies such as the U.S. Forest Service that has chosen to submit agency comments during the EFSEC process without full understanding of the planning background and environmental impacts. It is not consistent with the NSA, or with local economic development objectives, for a federal agency to weigh in on County and State issues regarding the long fixed border of the National Scenic Area and to state that projects that are clearly outside the NSA but can be viewed from within the NSA should be treated as if they are within the NSA boundary.

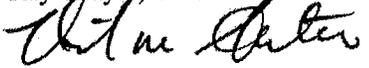
We are appealing for your understanding of this matter and your support for not restricting development based on the NSA, outside established Scenic Area boundaries.

Sincerely,

BOARD OF COUNTY COMMISSIONERS  
Klickitat County, Washington

  
Rex F. Johnston, Chairman

  
Ray Thayer, Commissioner

  
David M. Sauter, Commissioner