



Confederated Tribes and Bands Established by the  
Of the Yakama Nation Treaty of June 9, 1855

January 14, 2004

Allen J. Fiksdal  
Manager, EFSEC  
P.O. Box 43172  
Olympia, WA 98504-3172

Re: Wind Farm Development within the Ceded Lands of the Yakama Nation

Dear Mr. Fiksdal:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide comments on the Kittitas Valley Wind Power Project proposed development. This proposed wind power project is located within the Ceded Area of the Yakama Nation as identified in the Treaty of 1855 between the Yakama Nation and the U. S. Government. In the Treaty of 1855 the Yakama Nation allowed non-Yakama settlement within the Ceded Area, but retained certain very important rights. Among the retained rights are those relating to the cultural and spiritual practices of the Yakama People. When activities or developments are proposed that may affect the practice of these retained rights in the Ceded Area, the Yakama Nation becomes strongly concerned.

Recently there have been a large number of wind farm development proposals in the Ceded Area of the Yakama Nation. Locations of many of these proposed wind farms lie upon sacred ridges and mountains that recount the creation of the Yakama people. Yakama oral history describes how the proposed location of the Kittitas Valley Wind Power Project was used by the Yakama people to explain the origin of different weather conditions and served as a dividing line between the north and south. Ancient Yakama trails traverse the ridge tops and were used in the seasonal hunting, fishing, and gathering of foods. Archaeological Resources that are present at the Kittitas Valley Wind Power Project and its area of potential effect include burials, cairns, quarries, and hunting and gathering camps.

The Yakama Nation is particularly concerned that the regional effects of these wind farms on flora and fauna have not been adequately studied. A recent review of Bonneville Power Administration New Transmission and Generation Project Maps indicate that the Yakama Nation could soon be completely encircled by wind power farms. Our fear is that this will significantly change the existing flight paths of migratory birds that return annually to the Yakama Reservation. These birds have a spiritual value for the Yakama people and have been part of Yakama culture from its creation. Should these migratory birds fail to return to the Yakama Reservation the proponent of this Wind Power Project would be in direct violation of Article 3 of (12 Stat 951) by actively preventing the hunting of game upon the reserved lands of the Yakama Nation. A second concern of the Yakama Nation is the effect these wind power farms will have upon important foods and medicines. Little has been said by Sagebrush Power Partners L.L.C. on the longevity of these wind power developments. Members of the Yakama Nation have observed that this project area had an abundance of traditional foods that would be destroyed should wind turbines be constructed upon them. There is currently little research to show how much time is required for these plants to re-establish themselves on disturbed lithosols. Whether these foods become locally extinct remains an open question. Sagebrush Power Partners L.L.C. and its Wind Power Project could actively prevent the Yakama Nation from the gathering of its traditional foods and medicines upon its ceded lands.

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Presently the Yakama Nation is being asked to review several wind power proposals. These proposals are treated independent of each other, with only the local impacts of the projects being considered. As more and more wind farm projects are implemented in the future the cultural and natural resource impacts predicted for each individual project may greatly underestimate the combined impacts of many projects. Because of this the Yakama Nation will oppose all wind power projects as directed by Tribal Council Resolution T-129-95-06 passed on July 11, 1995; including the Kittitas Valley Wind Power Project proposal, until a regional approach to planning, impact assessment, and mitigation is completed.

The Yakama Nation feels that wind power can be an important source of clean energy for the region, especially if it can be used to lessen the burden now placed upon hydropower. We are asking that EFSEC and the wind power project proponents assist the Yakama Nation and other appropriate agencies in the development of this regional planning effort. A well-constructed plan will facilitate wind power projects in appropriate areas, protect and enhance the cultural and natural resources of the Region, and assist in cost-effective mitigation for those impacts, which cannot be avoided.

I would like to arrange a meeting between my staff and yours to begin the dialog leading to this regional planning effort. Please contact the Yakama Nations Deputy Director of Natural Resources, Carroll Palmer, to confirm a meeting date and agenda. My phone number is (509) 865-5121. From the number of wind power proposals generated in the past year, it seems that this effort cannot begin too soon.

Thank you again for the opportunity to present our views. I look forward to a mutually productive planning effort regarding the development of this very important resource.

Sincerely,



Carroll Palmer, Deputy Director  
Department of Natural Resources  
Yakama Nation