

Proposals would limit wind turbines Commission to consider plan

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MONTEREY — Citing the negative impacts of proposed turbine towers that would soar 400 feet above the ridgelines on Red Oak Knob, a recently formed citizens group, Highlanders for Responsible Development, has crafted zoning amendments that would prohibit industrial-sized wind generators in their county.

The Highland County Planning Commission will consider the group's amendments at a joint meeting with the Board of Supervisors at 7:30 p.m. Thursday at the county Modular Center. The proposed changes would limit wind generation to 100 kW (100,000 watts), and towers to 120 feet. Industrial-strength generators are rated in megawatts, or millions of watts.

Large wind turbines have been faulted for bird and bat kills, forest fragmentation, reducing tourism and for raising the cost of producing power. Small-scale wind generation typically supplies electricity to supplement farm and small community needs.

John R. Sweet of Mustoe, whose web site hosts the Highlanders' page, said that the county officials were "not obligated to look at the proposed amendment. Of course, we hope they do look at it."

The Highland County Board of Supervisors will also propose height-related zoning amendments at the Thursday meeting. Those proposals have no height restrictions, but would require tower builders to apply for conditional use permits.

Bracing for a series of gusty debates, residents of Highland County have further refined their skepticism over large-scale wind "farming" through web sites that link their cause to similar concerns as far away as Germany – and as close as the county line. Jack Mountain, which defines a ridge in southern Pendleton County, was the proposed site of a 50-turbine project until a citizens group, Friends of Beautiful Pendleton County called into question the builder's request to condemn private land. Pendleton County, which has no zoning restrictions, has organized a wind power informational meeting at 7 p.m. Feb. 28 at the Pendleton County High School Auditorium.

Raising new questions over wind power's already shaky "green" status, the Pendleton group has publicized Federal Aviation Administration regulations that require aircraft warning lights on structures taller than 200 feet – including wind turbines.

Sidebar

Highlanders for Responsible Development: <http://johnrsweet.com/Personal/Wind/hrd.html>
Interstate Renewable Energy Council: <http://www.irecusa.org/>
Virginia Wind Energy Collaborative: <http://web.jmu.edu/vwec>
Friends of Beautiful Pendleton County: http://www.hushhush_rushrush.com/
Citizens for Responsible Wind Power: http://www.responsible_wind.org/