

Back in May the Pendleton Times ran a front-page story on the coming boom in the vacation-home, second-home real estate market that was imminent for the county. The photo that accompanied the article was a green, expansive vista with the ridgeline of Town Mt. in the distance. Widely known as “the scenic jewel of the Potomac Highlands,” Pendleton County has many such vistas of valleys and mountain ridges. They form an unblemished, natural landscape that is becoming increasingly rare and increasingly valuable.

Unfortunately, the county commission has, perhaps unwittingly, entered into an agreement that will effectively and permanently devalue that landscape. It will devalue not just the land of property owners within the view-shed of the Jack Mt. wind turbine industrial zone but also the land of all other property owners in Pendleton County. Prospective purchasers of real estate are going to think twice about choosing to locate their vacation or retirement home in a county that cares so little about preserving its scenic treasures. After Jack Mt. is ruined, where will the next set of turbines appear?

Tom Matthews, president of US Wind Force, was quoted in the *Charleston Gazette*, Dec. 28, 2001 describing the suitability of the Mt. Storm location for the proposed 166-wind-turbine industrial zone by saying, “You could not pick a more disturbed area. It is primarily made up of reclaimed and active strip mines as well as abandoned deep mines.” Obviously, there is no need to worry about harming scenic values because there were none to begin with. Does Mr. Matthews think Jack Mt. is equally suitable for the same reasons? Fortunately, people in Pendleton County still do care about scenic values and property values, and they have thus far been spared the despoiled, industrialized landscape perpetrated on the people living in the northwest corner of Grant County.

The idea of electricity from the wind is environmentally praiseworthy but it is costly. The only reason large-scale wind generation is feasible is because of huge federal tax credits, subsidized by all taxpayers. Also, provisions in the deceptively titled Clear Skies Act of 2003 allow coal-fired power plants to avoid expensive pollution control upgrades by diluting their emissions/generation ratios with wholesale purchases of emission-free electricity from companies such as US Wind Force.

Mr. Cookman’s claims of benefits to Pendleton County include tourism, five permanent jobs, tax revenues and construction jobs. Most of the construction work will be done by trained crews brought in by the outside contractor, who are specialized in wind turbine installation. The increased tax revenues will become less after depreciation than what the county would have collected from the gradually appreciating real estate values now threatened by these eyesores. As for tourism, Mr. Cookman is desperately grasping at straws to think Pendleton County wants tourists who come for a one-time gawk at a wind turbine industrial zone and then go home. Pendleton County prefers tourists who come to enjoy the natural, unsullied beauty of the county, make return visits and perhaps eventually choose to purchase property here and to build a vacation or retirement home — that kind of tourism is threatened by this project.

The commissioners need to carefully reconsider the negative impact on property values that will result from going forward with this project. The immediate boost in property tax revenue they are keen on will not make up for the permanent loss of potential revenue from long-term appreciating real estate values.

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