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Opponents Discuss Wind Project

"Don't let these skunks in the door. They are going to change your way of life and your heritage."

Those were fighting words, and, at Monday evening's informational meeting about the proposed wind farm on Jack Mountain, they were stingingly uttered, more than once, by Mike Roberts, a resident of Moyers, who, later in the meeting, questioned the professionalism and/or integrity of this newspaper.

The meeting, which otherwise did not consist of inflammatory remarks, was intended to provide the public with a broad range of information on wind energy generally and on the potential impacts industrial scale wind energy projects might have on the environment, on the economic foundations of rural communities and on property values, information they do not want to be one-sided in that it only comes from wind energy entrepreneurs.

The host of the meeting, which took place in D. Michael Roberts Auditorium at the middle/high school was Robbie Sites, a native of this county.

Sites noted that he intends to



MONDAY EVENING'S MEETING providing information about industrial scale wind energy projects was attended by approximately 80 people. Shown above, from left, are Robbie Sites, Tom Brody, Gail Price, Mike Roberts and Don Speck.

help build a local organization that looks forward in regard to the proposed Liberty Gap wind farm and does not dwell on the past or alleged past mistakes by local officials.

It is to be an organization Sites hopes will encourage an open, candid and in-depth discussion and debate—a debate he hopes will include Liberty Gap officers—of the proposal to construct wind turbines on Jack Mountain near the Virginia/West Virginia border.

A panel of four speakers—all of whom stated their support for the development of wind as a renewable source of energy—addressed various aspects of wind energy, specifically industrial scale wind energy projects, to a crowd of around 80.

While conceptually embracing the development of clean, renewable sources of energy, most of those speakers said, in effect, "But not here."

The first panelist to speak was Gail Price, a new county resident

on Rt. 220 south of Franklin in the vicinity of Jack Mountain and who is married to school superintendent Ken Price.

Price is a much-honored tourism industry professional in West Virginia and in the two-state region that includes Bath, Highland and Pocahontas counties. She formerly was the director of the chamber of commerce in her native Highland County, VA, director of the Pocahontas County Convention and Visitors Bureau and now works in the private sector for Snowshoe Mountain Resort as director of sales.

Price disputed the assertion that wind turbines on mountaintops are worthy tourist attractions.

She said turbines such as those on Backbone Mountain in Tucker County or the ones proposed for Jack Mountain draw the attention of seekers of novelties and those who are opposed to the turbines on otherwise pristine mountain ridges.

She indicated that those types of so-called tourists are not part of a sustainable tourist market

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Wind...

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for communities in this region.

It was additionally noted by Price and other speakers that the eventual proliferation of wind turbines on ridges throughout parts of West Virginia and the Mid-Atlantic region will serve to diminish even the attention of the curious.

It was stated, too, that the mass proliferation of wind turbines would destroy scenic views and threaten the long-term prospects for the tourist industry in mountainous markets.

The next speaker was Roberts, who noted that he settled here with his wife, Paulette, after having been an attorney in Ohio.

What drew him to the area, he pointed out, was its quiet beauty, its lovely mountain setting and the exemplary quality of local

people and their values.

All of those things, he said, are placed at serious risk by the large-scale development of wind energy. He also asserted that wind turbines would depress property values and make Pendleton County less attractive to purchasers of second homes, retirees or others who might wish to move to a serene, rural county in the mountains.

Roberts warned that the construction of some 44 wind turbines on Jack Mountain "doesn't stop there," that there may be 150 to 200 "more towers coming in Pendleton County."

"Nobody's backyard will be safe from this rape," he continued. "I'm for wind energy, but not in Pendleton County. Don't let these skunks in the door."

Roberts was followed by Don Speck, a resident of Capito Hill Road who now does work for the

US Department of Agriculture and formerly did environmental impact studies for the Sugar Grove Navy base.

Speck told the newspaper he is concerned that the Liberty Gap developers may be "wolves in sheeps' clothing" and in his auditorium presentation said he wasn't opposed to wind energy just to "where it's situated and how it was done [here]."

"I think we can stop it," he said and noted that an acquaintance at the West Virginia Public Service Commission (PSC) reported that the PSC will not grant Liberty Gap expedited response to the Jack Mountain permit request and instead will allow the process to go forward for the full and maximum 270-day period.

Given that, he said, there might be a chance to "get them [Liberty Gap] to do a full-fledged environmental impact study rather than the two-page document that usually is what the PSC gets."

The next speaker was Tom Brody, a resident of Highland County, VA. He discussed opposition in that neighboring county to a proposed wind energy project that is smaller in scale than the one on Jack Mountain.

In addition to a host of other concerns, he raised questions about "sound pollution" being a profound disturbance to those living near wind turbines.

The final speaker was Dan Boone, of Garrett County, MD, a wildlife biologist who attended the meeting as a representative of Citizens for Responsible Wind Power.

Echoing issues raised by Brody, Boone discussed the effect of turbines on property values and the economic forces driving the wind power industry.

He pointed out that states such as Maryland, Pennsylvania and New York that deregulated utilities require that some percentage of the energy portfolio provided by private energy suppliers come from renewable energy sources such as wind power.

(That market, US Wind Force executives readily pointed out in an interview two weeks ago, is a key one for wind energy developers.)

He discussed in some detail the federal tax breaks and subsidies that encourage the domestic development of wind as a renewable energy source but said that the public therefore pays for that development in that "profit-intensive industry."

Boone went on to caution that the local discussion of wind power should not be one in which industry spokesmen are the "sole source of information."

He additionally warned of "nuisance problems" caused by wind turbines—sound and light flicker problems.

A wildlife biologist, Boone warned of the high rate of mortality of bats at wind turbine sites. He noted that bats help with the West Nile Virus because a "bat can eat lots of mosquitoes and other insects."

"Bats," he said, "are an important part of the eco-system."

Although Boone acknowledged that he is not an expert on eminent domain issues, he said that, in the course of tracking more than 100 other wind farm development proposals nationwide, the Liberty Gap proposal in this county was the first, to his knowledge, to involve the possible use of eminent domain.

"These guys," he said, "didn't set a high standard for ingratiating themselves with the people of Pendleton County."