

U.S. Wind files application for Jack Mountain project

FRANKLIN, W.Va. — As the prospect of an industrial wind facility in Highland County, Va., begins to move its way into the courts, neighboring Pendleton County has seen developer U.S. Wind Force forge ahead on its proposal for a 100-megawatt facility with 50 or more turbines on about 14 miles of Jack Mountain ridgeline. If constructed, the project would abut Highland in the Doe Hill area, and the company has expressed interest in expanding the project into Virginia there.

For more than a year, some Pendleton residents have joined forces to oppose the utility, particularly because it requires around seven miles of new transmission line crossing private property, and there has been much concern the powers of eminent domain could be used to force unwilling landowners to grant easements.

Last Wednesday, after withdrawing an application a year ago, U.S. Wind

Force re-submitted its formal request for a certificate to operate from the West Virginia Public Service Commission. The 618-page document was not available for review by The Recorder by deadline this week, but is expected to contain detailed information about the project and subsequent use of a transmission line less than 200 kv.

Opponents there formed “Friends of Beautiful Pendleton County,” a grassroots group, in response to the proposal last year. This week, one of the group’s representatives, Eve Firor, sent out a call for action to Pendleton residents and other interested citizens. “FOBPC is asking for your help if you believe this project will not benefit the people of Pendleton County,” she wrote.

The group is asking for letters to be written to the PSC; citizens willing to serve as “intervenors,” or expert witnesses, in the application review process; clerical assistance; and those with specific knowledge and background on areas covered in the application.

“The PSC does not have staff to verify the information contained in the application and relies on the community to monitor that what is stated in the application is in fact true, and that there have been no omissions,” she stated.

In addition, FOBPC is accepting donations to help cover the costs of legal expenses, and miscellaneous office costs like mailing.

This week, FOBPC member Viola Riggelman reports that 25 easements for the transmission line were put on record Tuesday at the Pendleton courthouse. The developer has been working for months to secure enough landowner easements for the line, and it is unclear at this point whether it is enough to connect its project with the Franklin substation. U.S. Wind Force hosted a party last Saturday for Pendleton residents who signed contracts with the intent to grant easements.

— Anne Adams