

Senator Allen hears from HNWD

BY ANNE ADAMS • STAFF WRITER

WASHINGTON, D.C. — It seems yet another high-ranking official has been solicited to lend a hand to Highland New Wind Development's effort for approval of a wind utility in Highland.

HNWD's attorney John Flora requested help from Virginia's U.S. Sen. George Allen last month in obtaining less stringent siting guidelines for wind facilities from the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service.

Allen forwarded that letter to the Department of the Interior Jan. 11, saying "immediate and expeditious assistance with the requests and concerns expressed in this case would be greatly appreciated." The senator sent the request to Alexandra Pitts, Chief of the office of Congressional and Legislative Affairs, in Washington.

Flora's letter to Allen urges the senator to convince USFWS that its interim guidelines for avoiding wildlife impacts from wind turbines, which have expired, need to be updated to provide "more specific and restrained guidelines on what should be required." (See sidebar for details).

In addition, Flora claims, "Those who oppose development of and construction of wind turbines do so primarily because of proxim-

ity, not because of environmental or ecological concerns ... The bottom line is that wind turbines are not dangerous to birds ...

"The real issue is that the United States Fish and Wildlife Service has adopted a NIMBY approach of not wanting any tall structures on ridge lines in the eastern part of the United States," Flora tells Allen. "That type of regulatory practice needs to be stopped and I hope you are in a position to help us with this problem."

According to Allen's press secretary David Snepp, the senator has not yet received a reply from Pitts about Flora's letter. "And that's not usual — mail moves slowly here in Washington," Snepp said.

Snepp told The Recorder Allen is generally familiar with HNWD's proposal in Highland. "The senator's staff has met with (those) on both sides of the issue and Sen. Allen is aware of (the project)," he said. As a general rule, Allen does not comment on constituent letters as he believes every constituent has the right to petition the government for assistance. "But (Sen. Allen) has not taken a position on HNWD's letter," Snepp said.

Allen's letter to Pitts is a typical "proforma request" used with most correspondence, Snepp said, and he expects Pitts will respond.

"She'll have to get back (to Allen). Generally any letter from a senator is a flag that they need to respond, but I can't comment on the process at the Department of the Interior (as to how it will be handled)," he said.

Allen is a member of the federal Energy and Natural Resources Committee, to which he was appointed last year, and has stated his policy for reducing the country's dependence on foreign oil.

"If you've seen him, as late as last night on Larry King Live, you know Sen. Allen talks about energy policy a lot, and you may have gathered that his general policy is that America needs a multi-phased approach, on everything from domestic clean coal to nuclear and biofuels. And that would include wind. But currently, Sen. Allen believes wind as an option is not terribly efficient, and often impacts the beauty of a ridge line beyond its benefits," Snepp said. "Like so many others, he has had to reassess his position, but he does remain open to the possibility that the wind industry will eventually find a way to increase its capacity. But at this point, he just doesn't believe it's terribly efficient and there are more affordable and reliable energy sources for our economy."