

## **MORE THOUGHTS ABOUT WIND POWER**

### ***Another letter to the Editor***

Regarding the NedPower proposal to develop a windmill farm along the Allegheny Front in Grant County (Second windmill farm proposed at Mount Storm, Gazette, Friday August 16, 2002, By Jim Balow), it would be erroneous to assume the windmills would not be visible from public viewing areas as a NedPower representative has stated.

Bear Rocks and Stack Rocks along the Allegheny Front are owned by the Nature Conservancy and open to the public. Both are just south of the southern limits of the proposed project, as outlined to the Grant County Commissioners. Both are heavily visited by hikers, campers, backpackers, birders, nature photographers, and nature lovers. They are geologically and naturally unique microenvironments that have been preserved from development. The towers would ruin the view from both of these places.

The Monongahela National Forest, the crown jewel in West Virginia's natural areas, is located just south of the project area. Part of the plateau there is taken up by the Dolly Sods Wilderness, a congressionally declared wilderness, and the Dolly Sods Scenic area, set aside by the U.S. Forest Service as a unique natural area. Much of the remaining area on the plateau south of the eastern continental divide is either managed as wilderness or proposed for inclusion within the national forest. Both logging and mining are excluded in this area.

The Dolly Sods plateau is unique geologically. The Allegheny Front marks the western limit of the folded Appalachians, which were folded and uplifted when what is now North America collided with what is now Northwest Africa some 320 million years ago. To the west of the front, the force of that collision resulted in only mild ripples, in the case of the Dolly Sods, a shallow syncline or dipping valley.

It also is unique meteorologically. Prevailing winds from the northwest are compressed as they flow over the region, creating the winds that make the plateau so attractive to developers of wind power. But those same winds create a microclimate that is similar to parts of Canada many miles to the north.

The shallow dip of the underlying rocks also creates basins that are occupied by bogs - micro-habitats containing unique and somewhat rare plants.

The plateau is also home to woodcocks, or timberdoodles, in season. Other birds and animals use the plateau as either a seasonal or permanent home.

Everything about the Dolly Sods is unique.

The NedPower project, if developed, would be highly visible from Cabin Mountain, the eastern continental divide, Raven Ridge, and other high points within the national forest down to and including Roaring Plains.

(Continued next page)

I spent the past week camping on the Dolly Sods and hiked through much of the area, including Raven Ridge, Cabin Mountain, and around Bear Rocks. This is a beautiful and pristine region with expansive views from extensive heath meadows. Although the Mount Storm power plant, 14 miles distant, is visible on clear days, it is at a remote distance. Placing wind turbines closer than that point would over-power the views.

My enjoyment of these wild places this past week was tempered by the realization that the view could be marred by windmill towers. I am extremely unhappy over that prospect. I have urged NedPower, in the interest of the many people who come to enjoy their national forest in all its natural glory, to modify its proposal and place the towers north of the existing power plant. My support of wind power is tempered by my feeling that natural lands are being encroached upon from every side and the realization that we must fight to protect them from unseemly development.

On any weekend one can drive up to the Dolly Sods. You will see a large number of cars parked at the parking lot near Bear Rocks and throngs of people walking and climbing them, picking blueberries, hiking, taking photos, looking at migratory birds, or just lounging.

Farther south along the forest road you will find the trailhead for the wilderness area filled with cars of hikers and backpackers. Red Creek Campground will also be filled to capacity on most weekends.

Further, the Allegheny Front is a migratory flyway. Volunteers from the Allegheny Front Migratory Observatory band migrating songbirds along the front and count migrating raptors from a rock outcropping accessible from a gravel path from the parking lot just north of the Red Creek Campground from Aug. 10 to Oct. 10, 7-11 a.m. every day. Their work seems to show declining numbers of migrating songbirds, a decline that is consonant with similar studies elsewhere. Placing 200-foot high windmill towers along this flyway could interfere with this historic migration pattern.

I suggest a visit to these areas to see for yourself the impact the NedPower proposal would have on these natural places. They are precious. They are beautiful. They are loved and used by countless people - destinations for tourists. The NedPower proposal would, if allowed to proceed as planned, ruin both the views and the wilderness experience.

I realize that I am not a West Virginian, but I have traveled to the Monongahela National Forest for three decades. In that time, I have met a number of West Virginians, wonderful people who are friendly and gracious. I understand the economic issues West Virginians face, and generally support efforts toward economic development.

But economic development should not come at the price of desecrating the natural wonders of the state, wonders that are, after all, a large part of West Virginia's heritage and tourism destinations. Windmill power is cheap, clean, and certainly a worthy goal ... but not in an area where wilderness rules and man is but a visitor ... and not where people go in search of the Earth's beauty.

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