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Adverse Permit, Market Conditions Force Vote to end Radar Ridge Wind Project

RICHLAND, Wash. – After four years and an investment of more than \$4 million, the participating public utility districts and Energy Northwest voted last Thursday to terminate development of the Radar Ridge Wind Project near Naselle, Wash. The participating PUDs are Pacific County, Grays Harbor, Clallam County and Mason County 3.

The project, proposed to help some of Energy Northwest's member utilities in meeting their state mandated renewable energy I-937 requirements, would have generated up to 82 megawatts of electricity – enough energy to power approximately 18,000 homes. It was planned to consist of up to 32 wind turbines and be the first large-scale wind project in western Washington. The project was also favored for its "winter peaking" potential because it was expected to produce the majority of its power in the winter months when the participating utilities need it most. Radar Ridge would not have faced many of the transmission issues facing eastern Washington wind projects.

"A tremendous amount of work has been poured into this project by the participants and Energy Northwest to make this a viable, beneficial energy resource for our members," said Jack Baker, Energy Northwest vice president. "We are disappointed development could not continue, but the permitting framework U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service imposed on us going forward and schedule uncertainty was untenable."

The project was located in an area deemed by project opponents to be environmentally sensitive because of the presence of marbled murrelets. Murrelets are listed as a threatened species of seabird. Extensive, independent, scientific studies found that no murrelets nest atop the Radar Ridge site and few fly through the area. These studies were validated by a scientific peer review. Energy Northwest sought an incidental take permit from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service because those studies showed one bird could be harmed every two years.

However, USFWS recently presented the participants with its draft National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) alternative, which placed severe and detrimental conditions on the eventual operation of the project.

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Those conditions included shutting down the project's wind turbines during daylight hours for six and a half months out of the year; creating a \$10 million mitigation "fund" for the USFWS, not tied to Radar Ridge impact; granting only a five-year permit (instead of the standard 30-year permit), to be extended thereafter, following environmental reviews; and installing on the turbines new, unproven bird monitoring technology at great expense, which provides no mitigation value.

These proposed permit conditions, along with USFWS' continued delays in meeting key permitting deadlines, and a recent softening of the overall wind power market, caused a re-evaluation of the project, and the subsequent vote.

"U.S. Fish and Wildlife had stated up front obtaining the permits would not be easy, quick or cheap. They were right," Baker said. "However, we expected the conditions for the permit to be reasonable and based on the science. They were not."

The project would have provided economic benefits to Pacific County at a time when many communities are struggling, bringing new jobs and creating millions of dollars in both direct and indirect activity; as well as increased tax revenue to local communities.

About Energy Northwest

Energy Northwest develops, owns and operates a diverse mix of electricity generating resources, including hydro, solar and wind projects – and the Northwest's only nuclear power plant. These projects provide enough reliable, affordable and environmentally responsible energy to power more than a million homes each year, and that carbon-free electricity is provided at the cost of generation. As a Washington state, not-for-profit joint operating agency, Energy Northwest comprises 28 public power member utilities from across the state serving more than 1.5 million ratepayers. The agency continually explores new generation projects to meet its members' needs. Energy Northwest – www.energy-northwest.com.



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