

## Wind Energy Benefits the Local Economy

What makes the difference between a prosperous rural community and one that's struggling to survive? Typically, the answer is economic development. Rural counties that attract a diverse economic base can afford to modernize schools and provide appealing opportunities for their young people. New commercial activity also shifts the property tax burden off farmers, ranchers, and other local landowners. Good schools and lower taxes, produce both a healthy business climate and strong local community.

Our not-for-profit organization, Northwest Sustainable Energy for Economic Development (SEED), is committed to restoring vitality to rural economies by encouraging development of homegrown renewable energy. We are not affiliated with any developer and we do not have a position on any particular company's development efforts because no permit applications have yet been filed and so details of specific projects are not available. However, we do believe that wind power generation is appropriate for Kittitas County and would be beneficial to the local economy. We would not advocate for wind energy projects if we believed they caused harmful effects for local residents. On the contrary, research shows that properly designed and mitigated wind projects (1) are highly beneficial to the overall health of local economies<sup>1</sup>, and (2) have no adverse effects on the value of adjacent properties.<sup>2</sup>

Wind projects like those proposed in the Kittitas Valley are relatively new to Washington, but they've been fixtures on the European landscape for decades with no negative impact on the value of homes and commercial properties situated around them. A report issued by the European Commission which has studied wind farms in the U.S. as well as in Europe, where the countryside is more densely populated, found that realtors in communities where wind turbines have been or are about to be constructed detected no drop in the price or demand for neighboring property. Instead, the value of local real estate tends to rise as works take the new jobs created by the wind projects.<sup>3</sup>

Fears that noise from wind turbines would bother neighbors have turned out to be consistently unfounded. Homeowners have also responded overwhelmingly that the sight of wind turbines from their windows isn't a problem. Modern turbines are not noisy, and with sufficient buffers between turbines and other uses, are directly compatible with rural community land uses.<sup>4</sup>

After extensive research, we have found no credible evidence that wind farms have ever done anything but strengthen local property values and hold down the property tax burden for surrounding landowners.<sup>5</sup>

Wind farms look even better considering the consequences that other types of industrial, commercial, and residential development extract from communities. The Kittitas Valley is facing pressure to support housing subdivisions largely serving urban commuters, vacationers, and retirees. But the strain on local government is substantial: roads have to be built and maintained, water and sewer mains installed, and more police and other emergency personnel hired. According to recent studies, housing developments can end up costing a community more than they give back in taxes.<sup>6</sup> That's not to mention the loss of wilderness and wildlife.

Wind farms, in contrast, require few services from local government, and allow the rangeland they occupy to remain in service. Livestock, as well as wildlife, can continue to graze beneath wind turbines. Would Kittitas Valley rather decide its own future, by pursuing compatible local economic development, or become primarily a bedroom community for surrounding cities?

It's hard to beat the economic advantages wind farms offer rural communities, and we hope Kittitas Valley won't miss out on a rare opportunity to ensure the vitality of not only its economy but also its environment and rustic character. Communities in eastern Washington, Oregon, Wyoming, Texas, Minnesota, and other Great Plains states have already discovered that wind farms are good neighbors – providing skilled jobs, extra income for landowners, and a welcome boost to the property tax base as a whole. In Iowa, 240 megawatts of new wind capacity has produced 40 permanent jobs and \$2 million in taxes annually for counties and schools.

According to “Poised for Profit: How Clean Energy Can Power the Next High-Tech Job Surge in the Northwest” commissioned in part by the Washington Office of Trade and Economic Development,<sup>7</sup> the renewable energy industry could potentially create 30,000 new jobs, including jobs manufacturing wind turbines, across the Northwest over the next two decades. Rural communities will play a decisive role in wind power's progress. In return, wind development can diversify local economies and help rural America once again claim its place as a pillar of this country's economic prosperity.

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<sup>1</sup> "The Effect of Wind Energy Development on State and Local Economies" National Wind Coordinating Committee, 1997. <http://www.nationalwind.org/pubs/wes/wes05.htm>

<sup>2</sup> Taxpayers for Addison Wind Farm Newsletter, December 2000. [www.renewwisconsin.org/windfarm/addisontaxprs2.html](http://www.renewwisconsin.org/windfarm/addisontaxprs2.html)

<sup>3</sup> Environment Effects Statement for the Portland Wind Energy Project, prepared by Sinclair Knight Merz, 2001. [www.pacifichydro.com.au/files/PWEP/VoIC\\_SET\\_Pt6on.pdf](http://www.pacifichydro.com.au/files/PWEP/VoIC_SET_Pt6on.pdf)

<sup>4</sup> "A Summary of Research Conducted into Attitudes to Wind Power from 1990-1996," A. Simon, British Wind Energy Association, September 1996. [www.bwea.com](http://www.bwea.com)

<sup>5</sup> For more on public acceptance of wind farms, see: "Trends in Public Opinion" Alison Hill, British Wind Energy Association, 2001. [www.bwea.com/pdf/trendsbwea23.pdf](http://www.bwea.com/pdf/trendsbwea23.pdf) and "Tilting at Windmills: Public Opinion Toward Wind Energy," Paul Gipe, 1995 [www.awea.org/faq/aesthetics\\_old.html](http://www.awea.org/faq/aesthetics_old.html)

<sup>6</sup> "The Cost of Growth in Washington State," Columbia Public Interest Policy Institute, October 2000; "Skagit County Taxpayers Can Save Money by Saving Farms," American Farmland Trust, 1999 [www.farmland.org/news/042099.htm](http://www.farmland.org/news/042099.htm) See also: "Growing, Growing, Gone: Relentless Sprawl Trashes the Evergreen State," *Seattle Times*, July 21, 2002 <http://archives.seattletimes.nwsource.com/cgi-bin/texis.cgi/web/vortex/display?slug=layton21&date=20020721&query=sprawl+study+costs+>

<sup>7</sup> See: [www.climatesolutions.org/pubs/pdfs/CleanEnergyReport.pdf](http://www.climatesolutions.org/pubs/pdfs/CleanEnergyReport.pdf)