

Public Utilities Commission May 1, 2018
500 East Capital Avenue
Pierre, South Dakota 57501-5070
www.puc.sd.gov

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SOUTH DAKOTA PUBLIC
UTILITIES COMMISSION

Dear Chairperson and Commissioners,

I am writing this letter to comment and respond to open docket, EL17-055 in the matter of Crocker Wind Farm Permit Application

My name is Susan Handke and my interest in the Crocker Wind Farm application is this: I was born and raised in Clark County and grew up on a farm in Woodland Township. I walked the road north of our place to attend an old country school house. I almost froze to death in a blizzard walking that road. I won a state science competition from the School of Mines in Rapid City for a rock collection I gathered from that road. I am proud of my heritage growing up on the farm and I have a reverence for the land and animals I grew up with. In 2005 I was blessed to inherit a portion of that farm my mother and father worked so hard for. I covet it and want to preserve and protect it.

That being a brief history substantiating my present interest, I will now try to convey my concerns relating to the proposals set forth by Crocker Wind Farm and U.S. Fish and Wildlife in their Environmental Assessment. In 2014 I signed documents to enter 163 acres of [REDACTED] in Clark County S.D. into U.S. Fish and Wildlife grassland and wetland easements. I naively believed I was placing my property into a sound conservation contract. I believed the contract would guarantee in its perpetuity, the details spelled out in the contract to protect existing habitat and wildlife. I believed the contract would protect the property from future environmental manipulation by enemies of good conservation practice.

Now in 2018, I find that none of those assumptions were correct. It now seems that U.S. Fish and Wildlife is assisting Energy Developers in the industrialization process. It appears that they are assisting in the development and integration of the proposed wind farm project into bird and wildlife sanctuary on a large scale. You can call it mitigation or you can call it making it palatable, either way it seems to me the PUC will be less likely to turn it down with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife endorsement.

How could it be possible for the PUC to question pages upon pages of credentialed experts who have given witness to the many details that are addressed in the environmental assessment. This environmental assessment in my opinion is neither objective nor free of bias. I would like to see an assessment conducted by an environmental agency that is not hired by the developer

of the wind farm. Make this assessment relevant by hiring an environmental agency that is NOT hired by the wind farm developer. Please!

In addition, as I reflect on and write my comments, it becomes clearer to me why I have conflict with the environmental assessment carried out by Crocker Wind and US Fish and Wildlife. It seems they are partners in the endeavor to pass it by the PUC. I quote from one of Crocker's hired consultants: "FWS is the decision-maker for siting turbines on FWS easement lands, and FWS has established a process for doing so." It is for that reason, I cannot accept any part of the environmental assessment made by Crocker Wind Energy and Waubay US Fish and Wildlife as being accurate or unbiased. In the volumes of studies in the environmental assessment, the state of South Dakota has allowed the wind energy developer to substantiate their agenda with expert witness and academic accrediting of their choosing. Does this mean US Fish and Wildlife is in partnership with the energy companies for getting their transmission lines and turbines stretched across the Midwest. It was set in motion in 2015 when CAPX2020 broke ground for the Clear Lake and Brookings substations built by Xcel Energy along eastern South Dakota's border with Minnesota. Or even further back when the energy lobbyists in Washington secured tax benefits and credits to tempt state governments to embrace renewable wind energy on such a massive scale. What we are seeing in the Waubay "Environmental Assessment" is how the energy company is going to get their turbines and transmission lines across the northeast part of South Dakota into North Dakota, regardless of who they trample over to do it. Don't ask me to verify it by giving it authentic consideration of fairness.

I have a grassland and wetland easement and was told I could NOT plant native wild flower seeds on that land, nothing would be allowed that required digging into the soil. I was also told we could not drive a tractor to close to the wetland if it left too much of a rut from the tire wheel creating a drainage exit for water. The disparity shown by these two examples is quite remarkable. I could give the names of the individuals that made these declarations if you are interested.

My final comments relate to other areas of concern. I would like to know who regulates the source of potential investors in easements on South Dakota soil. Does the PUC govern these potential sales or does the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission? I would like to know how the State of South Dakota regulates the disparity between participatory and non participatory land owners relative to property taxes, property values, and nuisance noise. I understand that tax basis increases for dwellings are increasing, at the same time those inhabitants can expect a lower value for their dwelling because it lies in proximity to the wind farm foot print.

I would like to comment on the disparity of economic return to land owners with wetland and or grassland easements who have been paid for the easements, and now if this proposal is accepted will receive additional reimbursement for turbines and transmission lines. I am not participating in the Wind Farm sign up. I will say again there is a discrepancy here. I was denied planting native wild flower seed on grassland easement because it would dig up the ground. I was told not to drive the tractor too close to the wetland to avoid leaving a tire rut that would act as a drainage exit for water.

Finally, I would like to make a comment on the learning curve that exists for everyone. I am not against renewable energy. I am against throwing caution to the wind and investing in renewable wind energy on such a massive scale. We would never be advised by a financial advisor to put all of our eggs in one basket. I think it is very risky for the states to allow such massive and exclusive development by wind energy companies without proven track record of longevity, both economically and environmentally. The influence of foreign investment on this scale could lead to a new "Saudi Arabia" and I don't mean that to be flattering.

The other consideration I would like to make is that the people of South Dakota seem to be questioning more and more if they want to embrace the Wind Energy proposals. The communities are learning they can stop Big Wind Energy on the local level. The people of Davison County South Dakota denied for the second time a wind energy proposal to build a wind farm near Mitchell. They have had the advantage of watching other communities amid applications and proposals, and learned that they didn't want it for their community. They had opponents and proponents for a lot the same reasons that the Crocker project has opponents and proponents, but they turned it down at the local level mostly because of the impact to the landscape, property values and quality of life issues.

We are not at the local level with the Crocker Wind Farm. The PUC of South Dakota is deciding the matter with EL 17-055 request. It is not too late to listen to caution and vote to deny Crocker Wind Farm their application.

Thank you for your consideration, I appreciate being heard.

Susan Handke [REDACTED]
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Fort Myers, Florida 33919

Susan Handke 5/1/2018