

BEFORE THE PUBLIC UTILITIES COMMISSION
OF THE STATE OF SOUTH DAKOTA

IN THE MATTER OF THE APPLICATION BY CROCKER WIND FARM, LLC FOR A
PERMIT FOR A WIND ENERGY FACILITY AND A 345 KV TRANSMISSION LINE IN
CLARK COUNTY, SOUTH DAKOTA, FOR CROCKER WIND FARM

SD PUC DOCKET EL-17-055

PREFILED TESTIMONY OF JODY OBERMEIER
ON BEHALF OF CROCKER WIND FARM, LLC

April 13, 2018

1 **I. INTRODUCTION & BACKGROUND**

2

3 **Q. Please state your name and address.**

4 A. My name is Jody Obermeier and my address is 16018 417a Avenue, Clark,
5 South Dakota.

6

7 **Q. Please describe your familiarity with the Crocker Wind Farm (the “Project”).**

8 A. I, along with my family, am a participating landowner in the Project. When
9 Crocker Wind Farm, LLC (“Crocker”) came to our family with the opportunity to
10 be participating landowners in the Project, we decided it was what was best for
11 our land, our family, and our community.

12

13 **Q. What is the purpose of your testimony?**

14 A. The purpose of my testimony is to explain the Project’s great benefits from the
15 perspective of a farmer, wife and mother, member of this community, and
16 landowner.

17

18 **Q. Please describe your home.**

19 A. I live on the Obermeier Ranch, a third generation ranch in the Crocker Hills, with
20 my husband Ted. My husband and his brother took over the ranch from their
21 father and we continue to operate it as a family. We mainly raise cattle, but we
22 also have crops. I grew up in a neighboring community to the Project. My
23 parents and siblings still reside in this area. Our family roots and family pride run
24 deep. This area is our home, and it is where we want to be and where we want
25 to raise our children.

26

27 **II. BENEFITS OF THE PROJECT**

28

29 **Q. Why did you decide to participate in the Project?**

30 A. My family decided to participate in the Project because we wanted to do what
31 was best for our land, our family, and our community. Our land is our livelihood,

1 and taking care of it is very important to my family. Everything that happens on
2 our land is carefully thought-out – whether it's where to graze our cattle or what
3 crop rotation we should use. We do what is best for the condition of the land – it
4 is a valuable resource and is an important part of not only our family's history, but
5 our future.

6
7 **Q. Describe your interactions with the Applicant.**

8 A. When Crocker approached our family with an opportunity to be part of the
9 Project, we made the decision to participate after a lot of careful thought,
10 research, and collaboration with Crocker. We worked closely with Crocker to
11 develop our lease agreement over the course of a couple years. Crocker
12 considered our thoughts and requests, and has shown itself to be a very
13 responsible, respectful company.

14
15 **Q. What does the Project mean for you and your family?**

16 A. The Project means stability, financial security, a way to pay debt, and a way to
17 diversify our ranch. The wind farm is a great opportunity to maximize the use of
18 our property, allowing our operation to grow and remain competitive in an
19 industry where farming operations have been getting bigger and bigger. The
20 Project provides a diverse and stable source of additional income, which is
21 especially important during bad crop years, or if crop and cattle prices are down.
22 The revenue from the Project will help us invest in our ranch, our family, and our
23 futures.

24
25 The Project also means a viable future here for our four children and other
26 children in our community. Being able to work off the land and in our home
27 community is something we learned as children and it is very important to us that
28 this value is passed on. As our children grow up and become adults, we hope
29 they can have the same opportunity we have had in making a living off the land.
30 We have seen how difficult making a living off the land as a young farmer or
31 rancher has become – many face struggles with the financial burdens and

1 volatile markets. Many children in communities like ours are forced to go
2 elsewhere looking for work because it is simply not feasible for them to stay and
3 making a living as a rancher or farmer in the communities in which they grew up,
4 or even in South Dakota. A stable income from the Project would help our ranch
5 and our community grow and thrive, and would create opportunities for our
6 children to make futures for themselves here.

7
8 **Q. In your view, how will the Project benefit the community?**

9 A. The Project would bring job opportunities to the community, particularly in the
10 construction phase. In addition to creating construction jobs, local businesses
11 will benefit from the increased economic activity during the construction period,
12 such as hotels hosting traveling workers, gas stations selling fuel and snacks,
13 restaurants and grocery stores supplying meals and food, local auto dealerships
14 and repair shops doing maintenance work on construction vehicles, and
15 hardware stores supplying things like safety glasses and lumber.

16
17 The Project will also provide tax revenue, increasing the local tax base, which will
18 benefit many aspects of the community, especially our schools. Expenses keep
19 going up over time, as do taxes. The Project would alleviate some of this burden
20 and would be a great source of income for our county and schools. The tax
21 revenue from the Project will benefit everyone in the community, not just the
22 participating landowners. For example, our property currently sits between two
23 operating wind farms – one north of us in Day County, and Oak Tree Wind Farm
24 southeast of us in Clark County. The Oak Tree Wind Farm is under 20
25 megawatts, and in 2016 provided over \$100,000 in taxes to the county. The
26 Project is much larger, and will provide even greater tax benefits to our
27 community. Additionally, the Project's community fund will have a great impact
28 on our local organizations.

29

1 The economic benefits that this Project will bring to our community, Clark County,
2 and the State should not be overlooked. Opportunities like this do not come
3 around every day.

4
5 **III. PROPERTY RIGHTS**

6
7 **Q. There has been some discussion at the public hearing and in public**
8 **comments regarding landowner rights. What is your perspective on this**
9 **issue?**

10 A. Our land is our livelihood – working off the land is something we do every day,
11 and we take great pride in taking care of our land. My family, along with many
12 other participating landowners in the Project, have worked the land for
13 generations with the hope that we can keep it in the family name and pass it to
14 the next generation. It is our way of life, and our landowner rights are sacred to
15 us.

16
17 Some of those opposed to the Project have argued that it is their right as
18 landowners to prevent me from having turbines on my property. I disagree that
19 this is the right way to look at this issue. Rather, I feel our neighbors in
20 opposition to the Project are being allowed more rights to dictate what we do on
21 our land than we as landowners are being allowed.

22
23 My family wants these turbines on our land – we own the land and made the
24 decision to invest in our family, our farm, and our future by participating in this
25 Project. I, as a landowner and resident, should have the right to determine what
26 I can do with my land without someone telling me I can't because it bothers them.
27 It is important for us to remember that our rights as individuals need to be
28 balanced with the rights of others. The changes and adjustments Crocker has
29 made to the Project layout as a result of community input have done exactly that.
30 Now it is the time for the Project to proceed.

31

1 **Q. With that perspective in mind, do you have a response to the concerns that**
2 **have been raised in this proceeding regarding wildlife and grasslands?**

3 A. Yes. As people who depend on the land, my family and I are conservationists.
4 We care about wildlife and the environment, and I think that framing this as “the
5 Project v. wildlife and grasslands” presents a false choice because the Project
6 will actually help participating landowners continue to be good stewards of the
7 environment. For example, I know that there have been some concerns about
8 the Project’s impacts on grasslands. However, it is important to remember that
9 these grasslands are on private property. First, I want to point out that it would
10 be unfair and against landowner rights if the Commission decided that turbines
11 couldn’t be placed on this private property because it would deprive landowners
12 of their ability to have a say in what they do with their property. Second, as
13 private property, a landowner could plow these grasslands up anytime he or she
14 wanted. Having wind turbines – with that additional source of revenue for
15 farmers – seems to me to make it more unlikely that a farmer would choose to
16 start farming in grasslands and would result in even greater conservation.

17
18 In addition, I know that some people have argued that setbacks from certain
19 areas should be imposed, even though there are not any state, federal, or local
20 laws that would actually require that. Again, I think that is against landowner
21 rights. If a non-participating landowner wants setbacks from his property, he
22 should have to go out and pay his neighbors for those property rights – he
23 shouldn’t be able to control what other people do with their property (and be the
24 cause of his neighbors losing out on valuable revenue) just by being the vocal
25 minority.

26
27 **IV. CONCLUSION**

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29 **Q. Does this conclude your rebuttal testimony?**

30 A. Yes.

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154 Dated this 13th day of April, 2018.

155

156

Jody Obermeier

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