

Opponents of Air Force plan receive help with their battle

By Chris Norred

Of the Emerald

A local group fighting an attempt by the U.S. Air Force to place a doomsday communications tower in rural Lane County, announced Wednesday that they have received a \$2,000 grant from the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation.

The grant constitutes the first major financial support for the No-Gwen Alliance of Eugene and Lane County, which was formed in opposition to the Air Force's plan to build a Ground Wave Emergency Network (GWEN) relay station about one mile north of Eugene.

The GWEN towers are being constructed nationwide and are designed to maintain radio communication in the event of a nuclear attack.

The alliance is prepared to use the funds for possible legal action in its pursuit of information from the U.S. Air Force explaining the role of the communications network in a nuclear conflict and its potential impact on the

environment.

The Air Force has issued an environmental assessment of constructing the GWEN tower, which concluded that there would be no major environmental impact, and as a result an environmental impact statement was unnecessary, said Mary O'Brien, environmental coordinator for the alliance.

One major environmental impact that GWEN will have is an increase in the "targetability" of Eugene, O'Brien said.

The Air Force plan calls for putting the GWEN towers in rural areas not already targeted for nuclear attack, she said.

"We believe (the Air Force) environmental assessment is illegal under the NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act)," she said. "The Air Force does not mention nuclear war or any effects of nuclear war in its environmental assessment of GWEN. They only address the impact of constructing the tower."

NEPA requires government agencies to take into consideration the environmental impact of a project before pursuing such a project, said Barbara Keller, legal coordinator for the alliance.

"If there is concern or a great degree of impact, then they need to do an impact statement," Keller said.

The alliance filed a Freedom of Information Act request on Nov. 22 asking for a detailed description of the role of GWEN in a nuclear war. The group has since received no response to its request, Keller said.

Peter Jensen, development director for the McKenzie River Gathering Foundation, said his group is concerned that the military has not been forthright about the environmental effects of GWEN.

The MRG Foundation is a fundraising organization that contributes to groups advocating social change in Oregon that are unlikely to receive sufficient funding from other sources.



Barbara Keller (left) and Mary O'Brien

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