

Renewable energy siting bill worries farmland advocates

More projects would be exempt from statewide panel review

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Increasing demand for renewable energy in Oregon has spurred a proposal to exempt most such projects from compulsory review by a statewide siting panel.

Supporters argue it would be less expensive and time-consuming for county governments to review plans for solar arrays and other renewable energy facilities.

However, advocates of farmland preservation argue that counties will scrutinize renewable energy projects less rigorously than the Energy Facility Siting Council, which aims to ensure such facilities meet

statewide standards.

Under House Bill 2329, the threshold for mandatory EFSC review of solar facilities would be increased from 100 to 200 acres of arable farmland and certain wind, geothermal and transmission projects would also be exempt from the statewide process.

A proposed amendment to the bill would require county governments to consider the same standards for siting energy facilities as EFSC.

“More renewables are coming to this state and we need to be ready to site them,” said Rikki Seguin, policy director for the Renewable Northwest non-profit group, during a Feb. 28 legislative hearing.

Oregon’s renewable energy portfolio standard calls for half the state’s power needs to be generated by renewable facilities by 2040. Some local governments, such as the City of Portland and Multnomah



Capital Press File

More solar projects would be exempt from mandatory review by Oregon’s Energy Facility Siting Council under a proposal before lawmakers.

County, have even more ambitious goals, she said.

The EFSC review process typically costs more than \$1 million to complete, compared to about \$50,000 to \$80,000 for the county land use process, she said. The statewide process also usually takes a year longer than the county process.

Developers face a “ticking clock” with federal tax incentives to build renewable energy facilities, she said. “This timeline makes

it more difficult to justify building projects in Oregon.”

When lawmakers established EFSC in 1975, the process was designed for coal, gas and nuclear plants, while solar and wind projects are more modular and don’t vary as much technologically from site to site, Seguin said.

All solar projects built so far in Oregon, except for one, have been approved through county processes

rather than EFSC, so county governments clearly have the expertise to deal with the issue, she said. Those counties that are short-staffed could also recover fees from developers to pay third-party consultants for review.

“We need to recognize our counties are fully capable of siting renewable energy projects at a time our state is demanding them,” Seguin said.

Each county government is unique not only with staffing and resources but also in how it applies statewide land use regulations and the standards it applies beyond the minimum requirements, said Todd Cornett, administrator of the energy facility siting division at the Oregon Department of Energy.

“The bill could result in significant variation in the review and conditions applied to renewable energy projects across the state,” Cornett said during a March 5 hearing on the bill.

Prohibition on cyanide devices debated in Oregon

Oregon Farm Bureau argues M-44s used sparingly in narrow circumstances

By MATEUSZ PERKOWSKI
Capital Press

Cyanide devices aimed at killing coyotes would be banned in Oregon under a bill that supporters claim is necessary to protect children, pets and non-target species.

The Oregon Farm Bureau, however, has urged lawmakers against approving the proposal, arguing the M-44 devices are needed for controlling the predators in severe weather and rugged terrain.

The contraptions were described by critics as “indiscriminate killers” during a Feb. 28 hearing before the Senate Committee on Environment and Natural Resources on Senate Bill 580, which would prohibit predator control implements that rely on cyanide.

“This is not a tool that we need. This is a tool that is dangerous and ineffective,” said Bob Sallinger, conservation director for the Audu-



Courtesy of USDA

A coyote attacks a lamb in this USDA photo. Oregon lawmakers are considering a prohibition against M-44 cyanide devices that target the predators.

bon Society of Portland.

There’s no way for signs to prevent wildlife from engaging with the devices and the “evidence is overwhelming” they regularly kill non-target animals, he said.

Between 2006 and 2016, the devices have unintentionally killed 376 domestic dogs, according to USDA statistics compiled by the Predator Defense environ-

mental group.

Proponents of SB 580 also testified about incidents in which M-44s have sickened people, such as the 2017 case in which such a device poisoned an Idaho teenager and killed his dog.

Danielle Clair of Benton County recounted witnessing the “horrific” death of her dog, which struggled for eight hours after it encountered

one of the devices in 2002.

“That was probably the most horrible day of my life,” Clair said, noting that several young children lived near the device’s location at the time. “It is a matter of time before a child is killed.”

Jonathan Sandau, public policy specialist with Oregon Farm Bureau, testified against SB 580, arguing that M-44s are deployed only by trained agents of USDA’s Wildlife Services division.

Since 2017, the agency has not deployed the devices on public lands in Oregon and has only used them in three Oregon counties, he said.

“These devices are used in Oregon under tight regulations and in limited capacity,” Sandau said.

If the USDA’s Wildlife Services division was prohibited from using M-44s, that would force the agency to use more expensive predator control tools that would draw resources from other programs, he said.

When asked by Sen. Floyd Prozanski, D-Eugene, about the “collateral damage” of pets killed by M-44s, Sandau said, “There’s been a learning curve” in signage and placement of the devices.

Oregon Solidarity wines coming to store shelves

By GEORGE PLAVEN
Capital Press

Solidarity is more than a feeling in the Oregon wine industry. It is now an exclu-

sive vintage.

When a large California winery abruptly rejected 2,000 tons of grapes from the Rogue Valley in Southern Oregon last year — ostensibly due to smoke damage from the season’s wildfires — it prompted several winemakers in the neighboring Willamette Valley to pull together and save as much of the crop as they could.

The result is three new wines, including a rose, Chardonnay and Pinot noir, named “Oregon Solidarity” to reflect the partnership. Industry leaders got their first taste of the rose during

a special event following the Oregon Wine Symposium on Feb. 12, and bottles became available on store shelves beginning March 1.

The Oregon Solidarity Chardonnay will be released on May, and Pinot noir on Aug. 1. Proceeds will benefit Rogue Valley growers who lost some or all of their grapes in 2018.

Copper Cane Wines & Provisions, based in Ruthersford, Calif., makes several popular Oregon wines under the brand name Elouan. Just days before harvest last year, the winery abruptly canceled orders from approximately 15 Rogue Valley vintners, citing smoky grapes and leaving an estimated \$4 million worth of fruit to rot on the vine.

The news sent shock

waves up Interstate 5, where King Estate Winery, of Eugene, Ore., and Willamette Valley Vineyards, near Salem, vowed to buy as many of the stranded grapes as possible at full contract price. Together, they purchased 140 tons of grapes at \$323,750, enough to make 7,500 cases of wine.

Christine Clair, winery director at Willamette Valley Vineyards, said the grapes were independently tested for smoke taint by ETS Laboratories in Medford, Ore. Results showed the samples tested had low enough levels of guaiacol and methylguaiacol — compounds released by burning wood that contribute to an unpleasant smoky or ashy flavor in wine — that they were not concerned with quality.

“We did not want to make any wine that would be faulted by any means,” Clair said.

Silvan Ridge Winery, also of Eugene, and The Eyrie Vineyards, of McMinnville, Ore., soon joined the coalition to help produce Oregon Solidarity wines. The first variety up for release, rose, was made 50/50 between Silvan Ridge and The Eyrie Vineyards, and bottled Feb. 7 at Willamette Valley Vineyards.

“It’s been received very well,” Clair said. “There was no reason why these grapes couldn’t be used in making high-quality wines. I think we’ve proven that.”

Oregon Solidarity wines are labeled from the Rogue Valley American Viticultural Area. While Clair said the 35-day federal government partial shutdown in late December and January did result in a backlog of wine label approvals at the federal Alcohol and Tobacco Tax and Trade Bureau, it appears that issue has been resolved with help from Oregon Democratic Sen. Ron Wyden.

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2nd Location 12 PM
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Chelsie Blanchard, B004; Pitsachaporn Boyd, A040, B012; Kelli Dooley, G051; Ash-leigh Kerekes-Queener, J026; Geneva Walters, A031; Cathy Holmes, J017; Bryan Huffman, J032; Tanya Manes, G006; David Neal, J027; Casey Stradley, J034

Cheese by any other name worries U.S. producers

By CAROL RYAN DUMAS
Capital Press

Dairy groups are urging U.S. negotiators to stand firm against attempts by the European Union to monopolize common cheese names, warning of severe consequences if restrictions expand on the use of terms such as parmesan, asiago and feta.

The U.S. Dairy Export Council and the Consortium for Common Food Names say the EU is aggressively pursuing geographic indication — called GI — status for common cheese names within its borders and abroad.

The impact of those efforts, left unabated, would cause a dramatic drop in demand for U.S. cheese, causing consumption to fall by 306 million pounds to 814 million pounds and prices to fall 14% in the short term.

Those reductions would result in a loss of \$9.5 billion to \$20 billion in dairy farm revenue from 2019 to 2021 depending on consumers’ willingness to pay more for cheeses with an EU GI label, according to a new study commissioned by the groups.

The study, by Informa Agribusiness Consulting, examined the hypothetical impact of the EU expanding its GI restrictions worldwide through trade agreements, including a potential agreement with the U.S.

GI is a term identifying a product originating from a specific geographic location, such as Parmigiano Reggiano. But the EU is attempting to restrict common names, such as parmesan, to products made only in the EU.

That would require U.S. cheese makers to stop marketing common cheeses to any market with GI restrictions. Those cheeses would have to be relabeled with names unfamiliar to consumers, resulting in fewer purchases and lower prices for those products, Informa stated.

“The changing consumer demand for U.S. cheeses would have profound and deleterious impacts on the U.S. dairy industry,” the Informa analysts said.

Falling consumption would lower farm gate milk prices from baseline forecasts by \$0.97 to \$2.14 per hundredweight in the first three years, the study predicted.

“Low milk prices and poor farm margins would exacerbate the ongoing loss of U.S. dairy farms,” the analysts said.

The study also examined long-range impacts if subsequent GI status is approved for popular cheeses such as provolone and mozzarella.

In that scenario, it found dairy farm margins would be significantly below breakeven levels for seven years of the 10-year forecast — forcing greater liquidation of the U.S. dairy herd.

And farm-level revenue losses would continue to mount, reaching as much as a cumulative \$71.8 billion over 10 years, the analysts said.

“This threat is serious and mounting,” Jaime Castaneda, executive director of the consortium, said in a press release announcing the study.

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