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Feds shut down Buttercreek wind farm construction

Little-known agency sites national security concerns and blocks Chinese-backed wind farm; 20-tower project too close to Navy Bombing Range

By David Sykes

A little-known committee of the federal government, the Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS, commonly pronounced "sifius") has shut down a 20-tower wind farm construction project on Kent Madison's property on Buttercreek near the Naval Bombing Range in North Morrow County, the Morrow County Planning Commission learned last week.

CFIUS, which monitors foreign investment in the U.S. for national security implications, last month ordered the project halted and all contractors, equipment and personnel removed from the site. No public explanation for the shutdown was given, and local officials were apparently under a gag order not to discuss the shutdown with the public.

The Heppner Gazette emailed CFIUS for comment on the order, and the committee, which is chaired by the Secretary of the Treasury, refused comment.

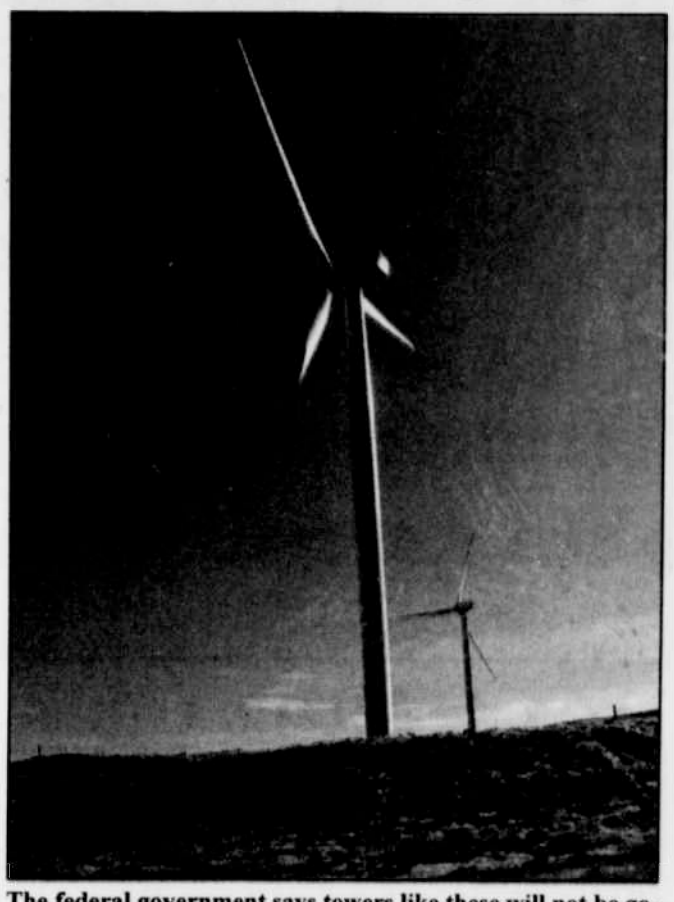
Requests by this newspaper for information on the shutdown were also submitted to Representative Greg Walden's and Senator Ron Wyden's offices, neither of which would return phone calls. However, the Gazette-Times was able to piece together some information on the shutdown, but with only speculation as to the reason.

The Buttercreek project is owned by a Chinese company called the Sany Group, which, among other things, builds wind towers. It is one of the largest private companies in China. According to sources, the company insists it has no connection to the Chinese government.

Speculation has increased that, because of the proximity to the Naval Bombing Range, the towers could somehow be used to monitor electronic or other aircraft activity at the range. The closest wind towers are approximately five miles from the edge of the Navy's restricted airspace at the Bombing Range.

According to sources, Sanya has denied this, and apparently brought a representative from Beijing on July 11, 2012 to answer questions to CFIUS concerning the project, with no resolution.

According to sources, Sany reportedly agreed to all conditions to assure the U.S. government that it has no malicious intent, including inspection of the equipment and wind farms on a 24/7 random basis. The government reportedly did not respond, only to state that it believes that Sany's ownership of the wind farm presents a "national security threat." Sources say that CFIUS has not disclosed to project owners, landowners or developers what that threat is, despite repeated requests from them for such information.



The federal government says towers like these will not be going up on the Buttercreek project.

To shut down construction on the 20-tower project, CFIUS issued a "cease and desist order" and ordered that Sany and its contractors cease construction immediately and remove all construction equipment, and not put any new equipment on the site. At least one Heppner contractor was reportedly ordered off the site.

Ken Madison of Madison Farms, who is landowner where the wind farm was being built, was contacted for comment by the Gazette-Times. Madison declined and referred the newspaper to developer Bob Guertin of Kirkland, WA. Guertin also declined to comment and directed all inquires to Todd Guerrero, an attorney in Minneapolis, MN who specializes in the wind energy. Repeated attempts to contact Guerrero for comment also went unanswered.

In an earlier related matter, at a June 2012 meeting of the Morrow County Planning Commission, project developers—at the request of the U.S. Navy, which operates the nearby Bombing Range—asked that one string of five wind towers on the same Buttercreek project be relocated. The planning commission approved moving the Lower Ridge Project string of towers 1.5 miles south of its original permitted location. The original permit for the entire Buttercreek wind project had been approved by the planning commission in the summer of 2010.

Changing the location of one of the strings of towers on the project was done to satisfy the Navy's concern that the towers interfered with flight patterns at the Bombing Range. The changes reportedly cost the developers around $200,000.

Since then, complete shutdown of the entire 20-tower project has sent speculation rampant in Morrow County, with some

-See WIND FARM SHUTDOWN/PAGE EIGHT

What is CFIUS?

According to Wikipeda, the online encyclopedia, The Committee on Foreign Investment in the United States (CFIUS, commonly pronounced "sifius") is an inter-agency committee of the United States Government that reviews the national security implications of foreign investments in U.S. companies or operations. Chaired by the Secretary of the Treasury, CFIUS includes representatives from 16 U.S. departments and agencies, including the Defense, State and Commerce departments, as well as (most recently) the Department of Homeland Security. CFIUS was established by Gerald Ford's Executive Order 11858 in 1975.

Following is the email received by the Heppner Gazette-Times after requesting information on the Buttercreek project: "By law, information filed with CFIUS may not be disclosed by CFIUS to the public. Accordingly, the Department does not comment on information relating to specific CFIUS cases, including whether or not certain parties have filed notices for review."

NOAA issues Aug. climate summary for Heppner

August warmer than normal, data says

According to preliminary data received by NOAA's National Weather Service in Pendleton, OR, temperatures in Heppner averaged slightly warmer than normal during the month of August.

The average temperature was 71.1 degrees, which was 1.6 degrees above normal. High temperatures averaged 87.9 degrees, which was 2.4 degrees above normal. The highest was 98 degrees on the Aug. 7. Low temperatures averaged 54.2 degrees, which was 0.8 degrees above normal. The lowest was 41 degrees, on the 24th.

On 12 days, the temperature exceeded 90 degrees.

Precipitation totaled 0.00 inches during August, which was 0.39 inches below normal.

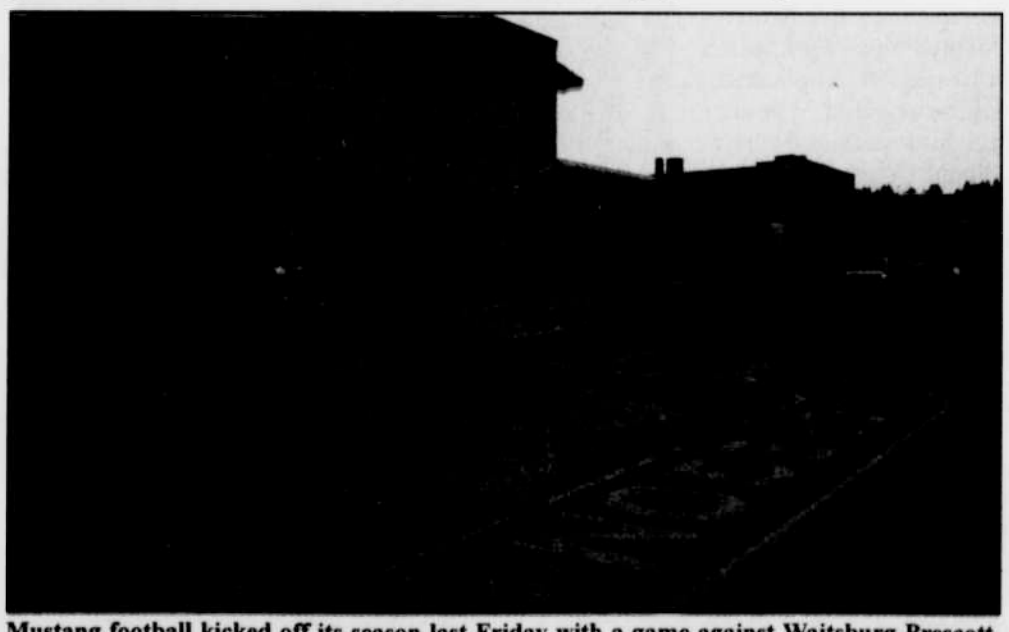
Precipitation this year has reached 11.37 inches, which is 1.99 inches above normal. Since October, the water year precipitation at Heppner has been 13.17 inches, which is 0.27 inches below normal.

The outlook for September from NOAA's Climate Prediction Center calls for near-normal temperatures and near- to below-normal precipitation. Normal highs for Heppner fall from 82 degrees at the start of September to 71 degrees at the end of September. Normal lows fall from 50 degrees to 43 degrees. The 30-year normal precipitation is 0.56 inches.

The National Weather Service is an office of the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, an agency of the U.S. Commerce Department.

Mustang football kicks off

Main Street convoy shows Heppner pride



Mustang football kicked off its season last Friday with a game against Waitsburg-Prescott. Though the Mustangs lost their first contest of year, they started the 2012 season with plenty of Mustang pride, as shown with the convoy down Main Street on Friday (above). Heppner's first home game is Sept. 14 against Willamina. *-Photo by Andrea Di Salvo*

Oregon public safety orgs endorse Smith

Rep. Greg Smith (R-Heppner) last week announced six additional endorsements for his re-election campaign for State Representative in House District 57.

Smith has earned the support of the Oregon Chiefs of Police, Oregon Council of Police Associations, Sheriffs of Oregon PAC, and the Oregon State Police Officers Association. Other public safety groups that have endorsed Rep. Smith include the Association of Oregon Corrections Employees and AFSCME, which also represents security guards at local correctional facilities.

"I appreciate the work of Oregon's law enforcement and corrections officers, and I'm proud to receive their support," Rep. Smith said. "As State Representative and member of the Joint Ways and Means Committee, I'm committed to giving our public safety community the tools and resources they need so they can effectively accomplish their jobs and keep our communities safe."

During his current term, Smith voted to give law enforcement greater ability to prosecute repeat drunk drivers, sexual predators and metal thieves. As Co-Chair of the Ways and Means Public Safety Subcommittee, he also worked to prevent budget cuts to Oregon's corrections system and other public safety programs.

ALL NEWS AND ADVERTISEMENT DEADLINE:
MONDAYS AT 5:00 P.M.

New wolf pack found

A new wolf pack was discovered by ODFW wolf program staff in northeast Oregon on Aug. 25 when a pair of gray-colored adult wolves with five gray pups was observed in the Upper Minam River drainage.

ODFW has received irregular wolf reports in the larger general area over the past several years. ODFW had been monitoring wolf activity in the Lower Minam River area since a photo of a black lactating female was taken on June 4. However, these new wolves appear to be unrelated to the lactating female, as they were all gray-colored.

The home range of these newly discovered wolves is unknown at this time, but represents the fifth litter of pups documented in 2012.

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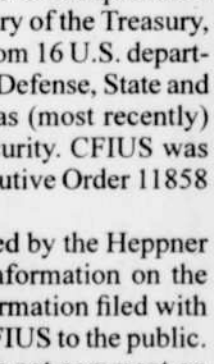

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