

Wheatridge wind farm seeks bigger turbine blades

By PHIL WRIGHT
STAFF WRITER

NextEra Energy Resources wants taller blades on turbines at its Wheatridge Wind Energy Facility sites in Umatilla and Morrow counties.

NextEra, based in Florida, bought the development rights for the 292-turbine wind farm in June 2017. The project would produce a maximum of 500 megawatts of power on almost 13,100 acres separated into two sites — the west turbine group about 7 miles northwest of Hepner and the east turbine group which spans the border of Morrow and Umatilla counties.

NextEra in early April told the Oregon Department of Energy it wants to use larger blades on its turbines. Company spokesman Steve Stengel said the blades would boost the height of the turbines from 476 feet to a maximum of 500 feet. The larger blades increase the ability to capture the wind, he said, and thus mean greater efficiency.

The company also wants to build a 20 megawatt battery storage site at Wheatridge East and a 30 megawatt battery storage site at Wheatridge West. Stengel said the storage units would fit into the project's existing footprint. NextEra in the April 6 letter stated the structures would have a neutral-colored finish to blend into the surroundings.

Overall, NextEra asserted in the letter, the changes are not significant, and thus asked the energy department to conduct a "Type B review" of recommended changes to the site certificate. That

review process is faster and does not include a public hearing.

The energy department replied April 25 and stated it "considers the proposed modifications to be complex" and thus warrant the longer, more stringent Type A review that includes a public hearing.

The battery storage systems are new components, the reply continued, which the department's Energy Facility Siting Council has not evaluated. The state also noted NextEra did not provide information about potential adverse effects from the storage systems, "particularly related to impacts and fire safety risk."

The ball now is in NextEra's court. Stengel said the company will continue to work with the department of energy and provide the information it requests.

Construction of Wheatridge has yet to begin. NextEra has until May 2020 to break ground and then three years to finish. Stengel said the longer review process means a greater cost to the company but should not push back construction.

Umatilla County in 2015 opposed the wind farm because Wheatridge Wind Energy's preliminary application to the Oregon Department of Energy and the Energy Facility Siting Council did not address where it would install transmission lines. The county paid \$22,608 to Kellington Law Group of Lake Oswego to review the case and defend the county's position of including the installation.

County counsel Doug Olsen and the county's former planning director, Tamra Mabbott, now with the city of Umatilla, sug-

gested the county seek the outside advice. Olsen said the money covered about a week's worth of work from the law firm, but once the siting council decided Wheatridge did not have to include powerline placement in the plan, the county's fight was finished. Commissioner George Murdock agreed. After that, he said, there was no use pursuing the matter.

Much of the discussion concerning Wheatridge and those powerlines took place in public meetings and public hearings. But deciding to drop the matter did not.

Mabbott at that time told the commissioners the county would seek reimbursement for the lawyer fees from the Oregon Department of Energy. Instead, Wheatridge will pay that tab.

Under the strategic investment plan the county and Wheatridge worked out in September 2017, the company will pay property taxes on the first \$25 million in real market value of the project, a community service fee up to \$500,000 a year for 15 years, and local improvement payments of \$150,000 a year for 15 years. Wheatridge also has to cut a \$22,607 check to cover the county's lawyer fees.

Olsen said none of that money comes in, however, until after the wind farm is operational.

Depot nominated for Opportunity Zone tax incentive

By JADE MCDOWELL
STAFF WRITER

As the Columbia Development Authority continues to work toward getting the former Umatilla Chemical Depot returned to local control, the state has nominated the Umatilla County side of the depot for a tax incentive program known as an opportunity zone.

The designation — which still needs final approval from the federal government — would offer some federal tax abatements on capital gains to developers building in the zone.

Melisa Druggie of Business Oregon updated the CDA board during a meeting Tuesday. She said while developers Business Oregon worked with said the designation probably wouldn't be the tipping point for whether they chose to build on a certain site, it is another "tool in the toolbox" for the CDA once it takes control of industrial land on the depot and works to market it.

"It never hurts to have it," she said.

The federal Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 allows states to nominate up to 25



STAFF PHOTO BY E.J. HARRIS

A line of storage igloos in G block at the Umatilla Chemical Depot.

percent of land in "low-income census tracts" for the federal government to approve for an opportunity zone. The Morrow County side of the depot does not fall into a low-income census tract.

Port of Morrow general manager Gary Neal said in his experience the zone would be of interest to only select types of companies with past experience on similar abatements.

Most of Tuesday's CDA meeting took place behind closed doors in executive session, but CDA direc-

tor Greg Smith gave a brief update to the board first, noting that one of the required public hearings for the Resource Conservation and Recovery Act environmental permit the depot needs before transfer was taking place later in the day. The permit is one of a few barriers left to transferring portions of the depot from Army control to the CDA. Another is negotiations over preservation or mitigation of historical and culturally sensitive sites on the property.

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* LeGoff et al. 2016, Opn Clinical Evidence White Paper, Oticon, Inc.
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