

GILLESPIE COUNTY ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION

Industrial Wind Farms

The Gillespie County Economic Development Commission strongly opposes the construction of industrial wind farms in Gillespie County and the surrounding Texas Hill Country area. This position is taken after a careful consideration of the issues associated with the economic and environmental impact of industrial wind farms.

The Hill Country is a jewel of Texas. It is highly touted and highly regarded for its landscapes and scenic beauty. It is a desirable area to both visit and live and property values and the robustness of the tourism economy reflect its attractiveness. Wind turbines are incompatible with the elements that make the Hill Country special. Their presence would cause irreversible harm. There is ample reason to believe that industrial wind farms would cause a general reduction in property values and would cause a significant reduction in tourism. Our county and city governments and our school districts are responsible and fiscally conservative. Accordingly, the loss of revenue from reduced tourist dollars and a tax base reduced by declining property values will result in a corresponding tax rate increase. Tax increases do not stimulate economic vitality.

The environmental impact of industrial wind farms is known. Wind turbines create a noise that is described as a penetrating low-frequency thudding vibration that travels even further than the measured audible noise. The spinning blades can create a flickering light on one side of a blade and a flickering shadow on the other side that can literally cause humans and animals to experience spatial disorientation. The spinning blades also kill and maim birds and bats. Each tower requires a cleared area of several acres at its base and the towers must be connected by roads capable of handling heavy equipment. The destruction of the landscape and wildlife habitat required for this is permanent. And, each tower is required to be lighted with a flashing red light at night. These adverse environmental impacts are a direct cause of the reduction in property values mentioned earlier.

The economic development commission generally applauds the search for alternative energy sources to satisfy our increasing demands. However, the commission is skeptical about the real potential for wind power's contribution.

The U.S. Department of Energy reports that wind power has the potential to contribute 1.2% of our energy demand by the year 2030. To achieve this miniscule contribution to energy needs the federal government subsidizes the construction of wind farms through production tax credits and accelerated depreciation schedules. This essentially passes along a majority of the cost of construction of wind farms to taxpayers. Industrial wind farms are not economically viable without these subsidies. The Gillespie County Economic Development Commission believes that the potential economic loss to the community is grossly out of proportion to the immeasurably small potential contribution industrial wind farms here could make to the energy solution.

The economic development commission respects the rights of individual property owners to make decisions regarding their property without outside interference. However, the commission is concerned that property owners who exercise their property rights and sign lease options with industrial wind companies are actually relinquishing control of their property. While industrial wind farms may provide some economic benefit to the participating land owner, adjacent landowners will experience a decrease in property values and other adverse effects which effectively infringes upon their property rights. And there are additional complications. Transmission lines will be required to move the electricity from the wind farms to the electric grid. It is likely that eminent domain would be used to acquire rights-of-way for new transmission lines from non-participating, unwilling land owners.

To summarize, the Gillespie County Economic Development Commission believes that concern for the economic cost to the Gillespie County community as a whole far outweighs consideration of uncertain financial benefits to a few and a marginal at best contribution to future energy needs.