

Issue Article 1— Wind Farm Proposed

Western Maryland's Garrett County is known for its scenic byways, its fall foliage, and its winter skiing. The people who live there—like others around the country—are concerned about the environment and understand the need for renewable energy.

But many Garrett County residents are against a wind company's proposal to erect about a hundred 400-foot tall wind turbines to generate clean electricity, stating that they do not want to spoil the scenic mountain views. "In order to attract people to a place like Garrett County with all its natural beauty, you want to keep as much of it as possible," says the president of the Garrett County Chamber of Commerce, which is against the proposal.

The wind turbines would be situated on private land on Backbone Mountain, and their presence would require large areas of forest to be cleared. Members of the group Save Western Maryland worry that the project would harm two endangered bat species that frequent the area. Bats and birds are often killed by wind turbines when they fly into the spinning blades.



"I'm all for clean, renewable energy—I own two hybrid vehicles," said one member of the group. "But this is just the wrong place for these things. We have some of the last unspoiled spots in Maryland."

According to the manager of Maryland's Renewable Energy Program, the state has a pressing need for renewable energy. Maryland currently imports 28 percent of its energy from other states, which puts a stress on its transmission lines. Without renewable energy, temporary interruptions of electric service during hot summer months could soon be necessary.

"We will reach a time when we will not be able to tell our kids or grandkids that flicking the switch will turn on the light," says the wind company chairman. "Wind power is a part of the solution."

Many residents support the project, citing benefits such as decreased utility bills and cleaner, more environmentally friendly energy. "This is not only about Garrett County," says one supporter. "It is much larger. It is about Maryland, our country, and the world."

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Issue Article 2— The Jewel of the Black Hills

The USDA Forest Service is charged with protecting national forests and managing them so that their five most important uses—livestock grazing, recreation, timber, water, and wildlife—may be enjoyed by future generations. Although simple in concept, managing for multiple uses often requires maintaining a delicate balancing act and resolving conflicts among different interests. One such conflict involves a small section of land in the Black Hills National Forest of South Dakota.

Rising from the Great Plains, the Black Hills are sometimes described as a “forested island in a sea of grass.” People hike, camp, fish, and hunt in the 1.5 million-acre National Forest. Some people hold special permits to graze their cattle in specified range areas.

A 165-acre area of the forest, nicknamed “The Jewel of the Black Hills,” lies within a large 7,200-acre area where three ranchers hold permits for grazing cattle. “The Jewel” was recently designated a special botanical area because six rare plant populations—including an orchid called the broad-lipped twayblade (*Listera convallarioides*)—have been found there. The botanical area also has groundwater springs that the plants need to live and that the livestock need for drinking.

The dilemma for the Forest Service is how to both protect this special ecosystem and honor the grazing permits that the ranchers hold. To keep the cattle from trampling the rare plants, the Forest Service is considering fencing the botanical area. But that would also keep the cattle from the only source of water in this part of the 7,200-acre pasture.

The cattle ranchers point out that cattle have been grazing in the area for nearly a century, and the rare plants are still there. They assert that if the Forest Service did nothing, the plants would continue to thrive. They say that if they cannot graze their cattle in the botanical area, they will have to reduce their herds because of the lack of



Grazing cattle. Photo by Keith Weller, USDA Agricultural Research Service.

water, which could force them to sell their farms or to seek other work to make up for the lost income.

Forest Service range managers say that the cattle have plenty of other land for grazing. They support the fencing idea and suggest that piping some of the water in the watering hole to a spot outside the fencing would allow the ranchers to maintain their herd size.

Forest Service botanists point out that moving the water source could have a negative impact on the rare plants, which depend on a certain amount of spring water to live. They say that although cattle have been grazing there for many years, no one knows how many of the rare plants would exist without the cattle.

There are citizens who support limited or elimination of livestock grazing on all public lands. Comments have been filed with the USDA Forest Service to remove livestock grazing from not only this botanical area but also the entire Black Hills National Forest. They advocate steps to preserve the forest ecosystem so they can return it to what they consider a more natural state.

Sources

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Issue Article 3 – ATV Use Considered



A recent proposal to allow all-terrain vehicles (ATVs) on state land in Vermont has stirred up strong feelings around the state. The new rule being considered by the Agency of Natural Resources would allow ATV riders to travel on designated trails in state-owned parks, forests, and wildlife management areas. Those state lands are currently closed to ATVs.

ATVs are 3- or 4-wheeled motorized vehicles that have large tires and that are designed to be ridden on all kinds of terrain. Originally used for farming, forestry, and law enforcement, they are now popular for recreation, trail riding, hunting, and camping. They allow access to backcountry areas and can bring in recreation dollars to nearby communities.

While popular, ATVs also present a number of concerns. They can severely affect the soil, spread invasive plant seeds, and disrupt sensitive wildlife. One ATV can emit as much air pollution per hour as 30 cars, and the noise they create can often be heard more than a mile away, thereby diminishing the enjoyment of the outdoors by others. In addition, some riders intentionally ride off-trail, which causes a destructive web of unauthorized “ghost” trails across the landscape.

The Vermont All-Terrain Sportsman’s Association, known as VASA, pushed for the new rule that the state is considering. According to VASA’s executive director, ATV riders are taxpayers and should have the same rights as others to access public land.

He says that many VASA members are in their retirement and can no longer walk great distances in the woods, but those retirees still enjoy beautiful scenery.

As he describes, “We have club activities, special rides, and barbecues. It’s a culture, and it’s a large culture here in Vermont.” He also says his organization wants to work with the state and private landowners to crack down on illegal riding.

The Vermont Natural Resources Council (VNRC) says that ATVs degrade the land and interfere with other land uses. They point to erosion and trail damage caused by both legal and illegal ATV use. They say that noisy ATVs make it difficult for hikers, bikers, horseback riders, and others to enjoy the woods. As one VNRC member said, “I do not believe that motorized recreation and nonmotorized recreation are compatible.”

Another member says that everyone should have access to state land. But she says that doesn’t have to include riding machines through the woods. “No one is preventing them access. They can walk; they can bike. They’re not getting any less access than anyone else. It’s their vehicle that can’t have the access.”

The head of the Agency of Natural Resources says, “Allowing ATV riders on state land would help us, both by paying for enforcement through user fees and by doing enforcement on the ground informally through their organizations. This option would actually assist us tremendously in a situation where the illegal riding is hard to patrol.”

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Issue Article 4— Controlling Cougar Populations

Cougars have a mixed reputation in Oregon. To some, they are animals that have awe-inspiring beauty and that symbolize an ecological success story. To others, they are nuisances that have moved into populated areas, thus threatening neighborhoods, pets, and children.

The controversy in Oregon stems from the fact that the cougar population in the state has swelled from approximately 300 in the 1960s to more than 5,700 in 2010—at the same time that the human population has doubled. To keep the cougar population in check, the Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife allows a certain number of cougar hunting permits each year. But an Oregon State Senator believes that is not enough and has proposed that the state allow hunting dogs to be used in the chase, a practice that is now banned.

Cougars, also known as mountain lions or pumas, are large cats that use a blend of stealth and power to stalk and kill their prey. Their primary food source is deer, but they also will eat elk, raccoons, and other mammals and birds. As a top predator, their population size is a good indicator of the health of the entire ecosystem. While cougars can live in a variety of habitats, they prefer areas with dense vegetation, including the Douglas fir forests in the southwestern Cascade Mountains.

Cougars are very territorial, and each cougar requires up to 100 square miles to survive. With more and more people moving into once-forested land and with the larger cougar population being pushed closer to human communities, cougars are more frequently crossing the line between wild and civilization. “What we’re finding is that cougars are trying to live where people live, and that’s creating a conflict,” says a state wildlife biologist.

A few years ago, for example, a cougar gave birth to a pair of kittens on the grounds of an elementary school in Eugene. And in 2010, authorities found a young cougar asleep in a tree near downtown Ashland. Cougars are capable of eating pets and attacking people, with children being the most vulnerable.

Some Oregonians believe that the use of hunting dogs would help control the cougar population and would reduce the possibility of attack. They say that the ban on hunting dogs gives the cougars an unfair advantage because the cats are difficult to stalk without them. They believe that since dogs typically chase a cougar up a tree—without directly harming it—that using them for hunting is humane. As one says, “If you think it’s inhumane to hunt cougars with dogs, is it okay for those cats to come into town and kill our family pets?”

Others believe that cougars are a natural part of Oregon’s ecosystem and that people must learn to co-exist with them. They point to the fact that cougar attacks are rare and that cougars usually avoid people. On average, there are only four attacks and one human fatality each year in all of the United States and Canada. They compare this statistic to the 30 average deaths per year in the United States alone caused by dog bites. They note that the state already can track down and destroy cougars that come dangerously close to a neighborhood or damage livestock. As one resident says, “People consider hound hunting inhumane and unsportsmanlike, and we don’t want it in Oregon.”



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