

Testimony to Senate Natural Resources Committee on Why the Grandpa's Knob Wind Project is Still a Threat and Why S-30 and the Moratorium on IW is Necessary

My name is Lisa Wright Garcia and I live in West Rutland, which is one of the four towns proposed to be "host towns" to the Grandpa's Knob Wind Project. I grew up in the home in which I live today. After living in Boston for 15 years, I moved back home with my husband and 3 children in 2001. I embraced coming back home and have invested everything I have into my property. I moved back home to raise my children in the rural lifestyle in which I was raised. I have long considered myself an environmentalist, have studied environmental science at UVM and have taught for Mass. Audubon. I have also tried to live the traditional Vermont values of good stewardship towards our land taught to me by my grandparents.

My home is adjacent to my mother's family farm, in a valley in the shadow of the ridgeline proposed for this project. Many members of my family and lifelong friends still live in the valley we call Whipple Hollow. We are land poor all of us, our property is the only equity we have. For the past 12 years since returning to Vermont, I have been a real estate appraiser, completing town wide reappraisals as well as private and bank appraisals. Much as Vermonters might argue about a "view tax" when grieving their tax assessments, I know as an appraiser beyond a doubt that views and bucolic settings are significant contributors to value for property in Vermont.

Steve Eisenberg of Reunion Power recently made statements in the local newspaper that his Grandpa's Knob Wind Project was not finished, but was only on "hiatus". We fear that this is true because he has 5 years of data on wind measurements, he has completed environmental studies, the PTCs were renewed by congress, and because as he said himself "we have friends in high places". More to the point, there is a system in place in our state government which favors developers of energy projects, and there is a powerful political will to support large scale renewables at any cost and without adequate scrutiny.

In January of 2012, I first got involved asking questions and then opposing industrial wind in my community. Prior to that, I knew of the proposed IW project for Ira and Clarendon, and while I listened to some of my neighbors who were proponents of the project as well as neighbors who had serious concerns about the health and noise impacts, and the environmental destruction involved with building these turbines, I didn't get personally involved. I didn't think it affected me. That is a big regret I have now, that I didn't learn more and get involved back then.

I first heard of the proposed project when one of my neighbors mentioned it at the gas station one day. He was quite upset as he is a farmer and had just got word that he would no longer be able to use the land adjacent to his farm that he had been leasing because the owner had leased the land to the wind developer. I was alarmed of course and went to our town manager that very day and asked about it. She told me that it looked like that project was not going anywhere because the ANR had stated that there were "adverse impacts that could not be mitigated".

So I went home reassured, surely if our own ANR has stated that this is a bad idea that would adversely impact the environment, then the project will never happen. A few short weeks later another neighbor came to me and shared concerns that this project was well under way and asked

if I would help to share awareness about the issue and get people to talk about this at town meeting. So we did just that and it became very clear at town meeting that the town manager and at least some of the select board members had already had extensive conversations with the developer and were being solicited to support this project in our town.

I wrote letters to the local newspapers about the negative impacts that would result from this project. Within days, I received multiple phone calls, as well as e-mails, from the developer asking if we could meet privately to talk about the project. I told him that I really had nothing to say to him that I wouldn't be completely comfortable saying in public, and that further, I felt I was speaking for my whole family and community. Selective invitations were also sent to area landowners, potential neighbors of the project, and to residents who had spoken out about the project to attend private meetings with the developer. I wondered then, and I ask you now, if this project is so much in the "public good", why are the meetings so secretive?

The proposed Grandpa's Knob project threatens our quality of life, our health, our property values which are the only investments most of us have, and it threatens the state of Vermont and everything that Vermont means. Allowing this project to happen means losing control of our local towns' ability to determine the type of development we want in our towns.

We educated our townspeople and worked the democratic process in our four towns since that day in January when I was made aware of this threat. Many, many hours of time have been spent on this issue, by town residents, Select board members, planning commissioners, and others – all scrambling to understand the impacts to our town from someone else's idea. Revolutionary War re-enactors presented the historical significance of the pristine Hubbardton Battlefield site and why it is so important to keep that site intact and unmarred by development on the also historic Pittsford Ridge. The Rutland County Audubon Society and the Lake Bomoseen Association have both voted to oppose the project. The Select Boards of all four towns have voted to oppose this project. All four towns have amended their town plans prohibiting ridgeline industrial wind. And the town of Hubbardton has held a town vote which in a landslide voted to oppose industrial wind. What additional tools do our small towns and middle-class townspeople have to tell this developer "no", your project is not welcome in our town? Yet the current Section 248 system would allow the PSB to place little or no weight on these local decisions.

The developer is still here, trying to get new leases to replace the landowners who have gotten out of their leases as they have decided that this deal wasn't what it was purported to be by the developer. He is still here, because the system is such that he could still apply for a CPG, he could still cash in on the PTCs, and the system or his "friends in high places" could allow him to proceed with this project in spite of the solid opposition from our towns.

The opposition to this project is still here as well, but many of us fear that the political climate is such that this project will be allowed to happen in spite of our efforts. Over the past year, we have all learned a great deal about the Section 248 process and what that will mean for us if the developer files for a CPG. We know that we will only have notice of 45 days before he files for the CPG, and we know what we will have to fight very hard for "intervenor status" to even have a voice in these hearings. We know that we have a snowballs chance in hell of winning if it gets

to that point. We know that we will fight this project all the way if we have to, and we worry about the emotional toll that battle alone will have on many of us, never mind the toll that actually living with turbines will have if they are built. It is very hard to fully enjoy our beautiful little valley when I look up at the ridgeline and think about what will be if the project is to happen. It is very hard to plan for the future of your property, planting trees and maintaining that forested landscape, when you aren't sure you will want to live there if this project is to happen.

From the beginning there has been an overwhelming pattern of disrespect for the people and other life that would be impacted by this project on the part of the developer. This disrespect has been allowed and encouraged by the system created by Section 248 which allows electrical energy generation facilities to go around the local and state processes that would normally regulate industrial development of this scale. Under the Section 248 process, the people who will be directly impacted by this project are barely relevant in the consideration of whether this project will cause undue adverse impact. The process is so overwhelming, time consuming, and costly that the average citizen is likely to give up at some point. Perhaps that is what the developer is waiting for with his "hiatus".

We know from other states that there is solid data on property value loss in the area around turbines. But we don't yet have specific data for Vermont, nor will we have it for several years. And yet again we are "building them as fast as we can". In terms of the state process, we haven't even considered this impact, and yet again we could learn from other places in the country that have required a "Property Value Guarantee" of IW developers. The current Section 248 process does not protect Vermont homeowners who might see a significant loss in their property value as a result of these projects. In fact, the current process doesn't even acknowledge that this is an impact.

This is why we need a moratorium on industrial wind. We need to use that time to reform the process for approving large scale energy projects. We need the moratorium and reforms proposed in S-30. The processes we have in place are working for the developers, they are not adequately protecting and serving Vermonters. The processes in place are not adequately or objectively analyzing the potential impacts of these projects. We need to make sure that Vermonters are treated justly and fairly in this process. We need to make sure that communities can say NO to these projects. We need to make sure that any project we undertake will truly deliver more "public good" than it will "undue adverse impacts" to our neighbors, our neighborhood and our environment.

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