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Cypress Wind Farm not Green Use of Environmentally Significant Public Land

A wind farm is being proposed next to Cypress Hills Provincial Park on environmentally sensitive native prairie. The Alberta Wilderness Association (AWA) is generally supportive of renewable energy developments as alternatives to fossil fuel production; however, they must be subject to rigorous environmental assessment and public involvement and they must not damage environmentally sensitive lands, especially those in public ownership. Locating wind farms on internationally significant grasslands in the Cypress Hills does not represent sustainable green energy production.

“AWA is extremely concerned about the lack of a Public Lands Policy and the ongoing lack of public involvement in decisions that negatively impact environmentally significant public lands,” says Cliff Wallis, AWA Past-President. “This area has been identified in studies funded by the Alberta government and international conservation organizations as being of national or international environmental significance due to the extent and quality of the grassland and associated plants and animals.”

The wind farm proposal by Ontario-based West WindEau Corporation will cover a township (almost 100 sq. km) of largely native prairie starting a mile west of the Graburn Road at the Cypress Hills Provincial Park boundary running west along the boundary five miles and north seven miles. The area lies mostly within the County of Cypress' Cypress Hills fringe area structure plan which maintains a buffer zone around the Park as agricultural land and specifies the importance of protecting viewsapes. The wind turbines will be 120 m high and construction will require many new roads capable of withstanding 500 ton crane trucks. Local ranchers may be paid as much as \$10,000/quarter section per year on private lands or leased Public Lands on which the wind turbines will be built.

AWA has been informed by local residents that Alberta Public Lands apparently has no objections to this proposal. West WindEau held a public meeting last week in Medicine Hat; however, the standard mode of operation is that decisions on public lands are made behind closed doors with no public involvement. Despite public protest, environmentally sensitive public grasslands with plant and animal species at risk were sold in the Bow Island area and cultivated for potato production within the last two years without any public involvement or concern about the loss of biodiversity.

“We are opposed to private interests benefiting from the destruction of these environmentally sensitive public lands,” adds Wallis. “We are also opposed to any change in use designation from agricultural and its associated viewscape protection to allow this industrial activity on private lands. Some of the deeded lands in this area have conservation easements and the terms do not allow wind farm development.”

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