



March 6, 2026

To: Austin Barnes, Marion County Principal Planner
From: Diane Brandt, Policy and Legislative Affairs Director, Renewable Northwest

Re: Marion County BESS Advisory Committee, Feedback on Proposed Setbacks

Thank you for the opportunity to participate in the Marion County Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) Advisory Committee (“BAC”) and for taking the time to thoughtfully address this critical piece of utility infrastructure.

Before addressing the specific proposed setbacks, Renewable Northwest (“RNW”) would like to flag that **it is unclear what concerns and/or risks these setbacks are meant to address.** Without a clear problem statement behind these proposed numbers, we believe it is difficult for any Committee member to calibrate inputs to Marion County’s situation. Therefore, we reiterate our request to take some time for general education about current battery technology, current safety standards, and why BESS are important for Marion County.

For now, in order to provide specific feedback, we have gathered inputs on the proposed setback numbers from our members who develop BESS nationwide. This allows us to offer feedback based on general industry best practices and flag potential serious implications of the currently proposed setbacks. We also want to emphasize again the importance of locating BESS in Marion County and offer thoughts on this below. I will be prepared to discuss all of these items at our next BAC meeting on behalf of RNW.

BESS is Valuable for Marion County

BESS systems were designed for communities like Marion County. All three utilities (in this case, referring to PGE, PacifiCorp, and BPA which serves many public power entities) currently serving the region are facing significant transmission capacity constraints throughout Oregon, and specifically within the Pearl-Sherwood-McLoughlin corridor, which is essential for delivering power to Marion County. Transmission capacity restraints limit the amount of electricity that can be reliably delivered without system upgrades. BESS systems help limit the reliability impacts of these constraints: BESS store electricity locally when there is excess capacity on the grid and then discharge that power locally during times when electricity usage is high and the capacity to move electricity from outside of the area is limited or constrained. This decreases stress on transmission lines, saves money by reducing the need for expensive new power lines, and increases reliability of electricity service to local businesses, farms, and households. BESS systems can also help maintain local reliable service during extreme weather events like ice

storms, heat waves, or wildfire. As such, BESS systems are critical not just to the regional energy grid but to local resilience planning. BESS reduces utility bills, allows for more economic growth, avoids the need for new transmission lines, and increases reliable power supply. However, they must be sited locally to deliver these benefits locally.

Aligning with Industry Standard: Additional Clarity Needed

RNW's comments from February 5, 2026, requested the Committee review updated best practices to align Marion County's ordinance with industry safety standards given technological updates. RNW is pleased to see that the road, property line, and dwelling setbacks are in line with industry standards. RNW has heard from members that some of the proposed setbacks are more conservative than current standards, and that further consideration of these is warranted. Additionally, further clarity on where setbacks are intended to begin for dwellings, forests, and floodplains is needed in determining alignment with industry standards and best practices.

Wetlands, Waterbodies, and Streams Exceed Regional Norms

RNW is most concerned with the proposed 1,000 foot setback to Wetlands, Waterbody, and Streams. This far exceeds typical environmental buffer requirements, and it is unclear what qualifies as a "water body". RNW would like to note that many counties in the region allow for buffer modifications for site-specific adjustments to these protected areas. As reference, below are regional examples of setbacks with buffer allowances for wetlands:

- Whatcom County, WA: Ranges depending on wetland classification and land use intensity from 25' - 300'. Source: 16.16.630 Table 1: Whatcom County Zoning Code
- Columbia County, WA: Ranges depending on wetland classification and land use intensity from 50'-200'
 - Source: 16.10.120(E)(7)(b): Columbia County Code
- Eugene, OR: Ranges depending on wetland classification and land use intensity from 25'-100' (or no buffer from wetland boundary for disturbed low value wetlands)
 - Source: Eugene Municipal Code
- Oregon Wetland Planning Guide: Riparian corridor 75' along streams with flow > 1000 CFS. 50' from bank of lakes.
 - Source: Oregon Wetland Planning Guide

Washington standards are informed by the Department of Ecology's [critical area guidance](#) and [shoreline master program guidelines](#). BESS systems typically land within a 50' - 225' setback once project and site specific adjustments are made.

Proposed Setbacks for BESS Siting Make Locating in Marion County Impossible

BESS systems are most effective and have minimal impacts when they are sited near existing transmission infrastructure and substations. This is not only because previous environmental review processes have already provided appropriate protections, but siting near existing infrastructure is efficient and minimizes the amount of new infrastructure needed to connect the

BESS system to the grid. However, spatial analysis shows that the proposed setbacks would make it extremely difficult to develop any BESS systems near existing infrastructure or within Marion County at all. Spatial analysis from RNW members shows that these proposed setbacks severely restrict the land available for BESS development, essentially codifying the current moratorium and making BESS siting in Marion nearly impossible. A RNW member characterizes this below:

“Marion County contains 115,494 total parcels. The 1,000 ft. proposed wetland/waterbodies/streams setback alone—the most restrictive of the proposed setbacks—would reduce the number of potentially viable parcels greater than 2-acres outside of the setback by 98% (Figure 1 below). This calculation does not yet account for the other proposed setbacks, zoning restrictions on those remaining parcels, or proximity to local transmission lines and substations necessary for BESS interconnection shown in subsequent figures.”

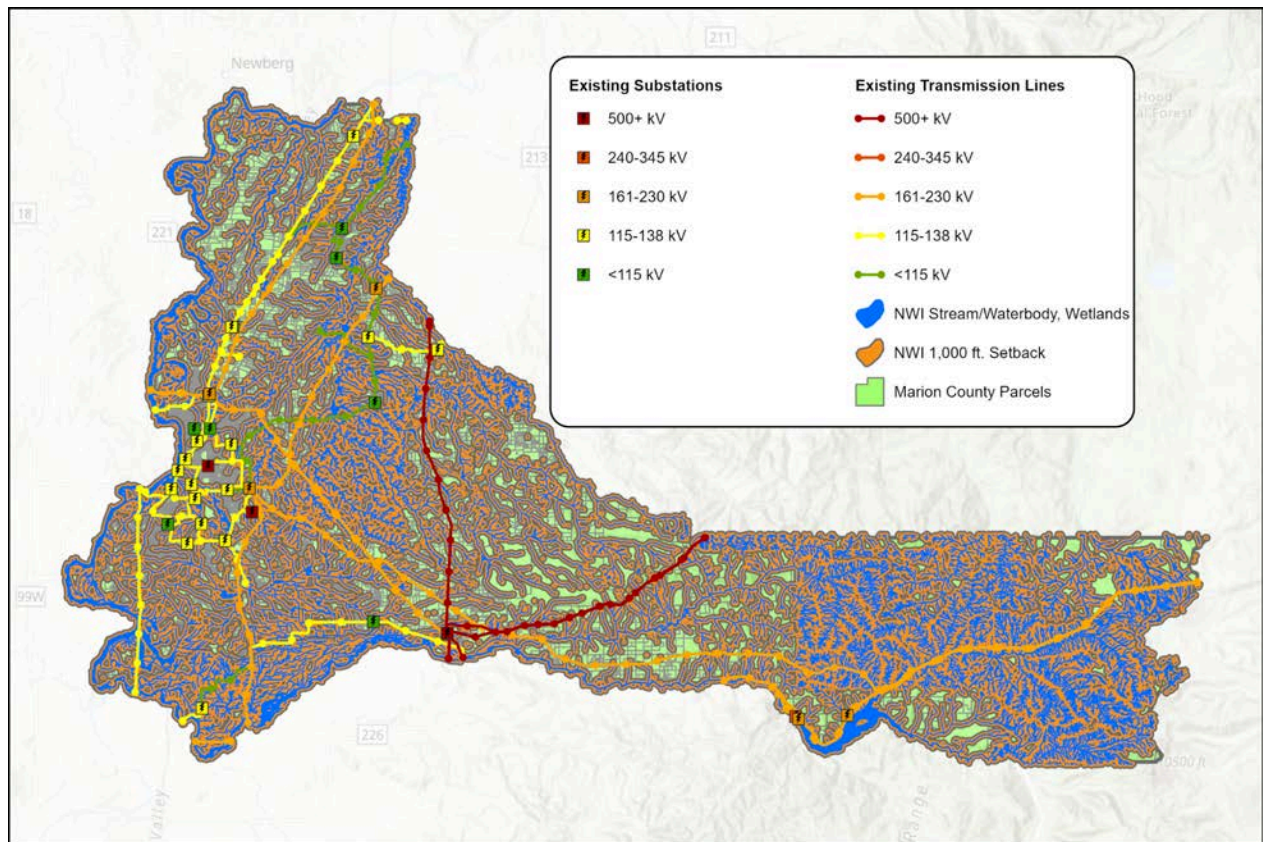


Figure 1 - Map showing impact of 1,000 ft. Stream, Waterbody, Wetland setback

Notice the impact of a proposed 1,000 ft Wetland, Stream, and Waterbody setback in relation to substations and transmission infrastructure in Figure 1. To minimize land impacts and maximize grid benefits, BESS is best sited within 3 miles of a substation or within 1 mile of existing transmission lines, which would be nearly impossible with only the stream, waterbody, and wetland setbacks in place.

With the addition of floodplain setbacks, **the proposed numbers render the County undevelopable to BESS systems**. Figure 2 below shows available land remaining for siting after the proposed setbacks are considered. Notice the land is predominantly timber and EFU land, and with the exception of southern Marion County, is not developable near existing energy infrastructure where the benefits of these systems would be realized.

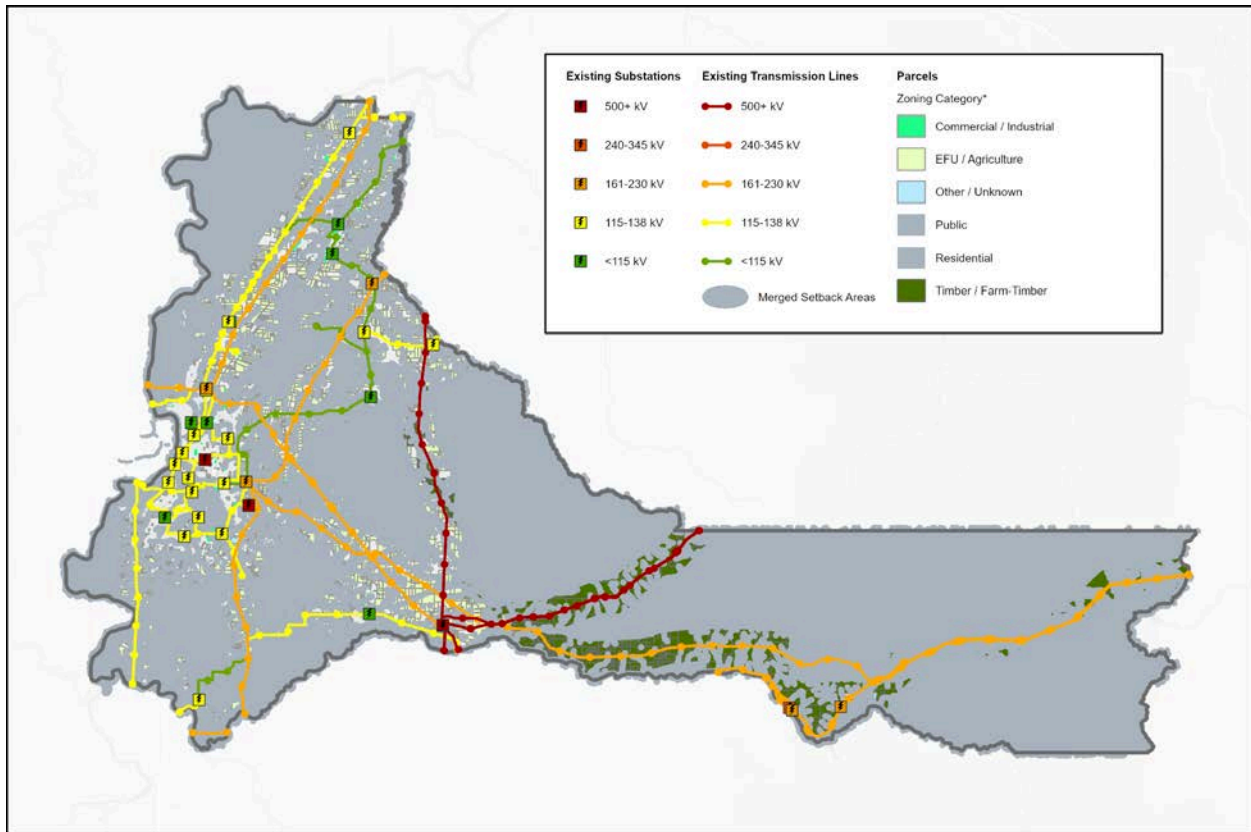


Figure 2 - Map showing remaining available land after proposed BESS setbacks

We hope that this spatial analysis and additional regional examples of setback and siting practices can be incorporated into the discussion and inform the Committee and offer grounded advice to County Staff through the drafting process. We look forward to working towards a BESS ordinance that prioritizes safety, aligns with industry standards, adds reliability to the regional grid, and lowers electricity prices for Marion county residents and businesses.

Sincerely,

Diane Brandt
 Policy and Legislative Affairs Director
 Renewable Northwest
 BESS Advisory Committee Participant