April 14, 2011

Umatilla County Board of Commissioners
Department of Land Use Planning
Attention: Tamra Mabbot
216 SE 4th Street
Pendleton, OR 97801

Dear Board of Commissioners,

In an effort to inform the decision of the Board of Commissioners regarding the proposed amendments to Umatilla County Development Code (UCDC) 152.615 and .616 (HHH), the Renewable Northwest Project has gathered what we believe represents rigorously researched scientific information regarding wind turbine operation, safety, and economic impact on local communities. The attached documents present diverse research and multiple literature reviews that address the economic benefits, impacts to property values, potential health effects, mechanical safety considerations and setback standards, and sound associated with an operating wind facility. There are many more resources available regarding each of these subjects and we have selected those which represent the best currently available science.

Like so many other rural Oregon counties, the health of Umatilla’s communities is founded on the responsible use of its abundant natural resources. Among those natural resources, Umatilla County has the potential to harvest biomass, solar, and wind-generated energy. Along with the hydro-system that helps keep our energy costs among the lowest in the nation, responsible development of Oregon’s other renewable resources will help revitalize the State’s economy and achieve energy independence. Statewide over $5.4 billion dollars has been invested through the renewable energy development industry. Of this, over $4.5 billion dollars have been invested by the wind energy sector alone. With over 350 MW of operating projects in Umatilla County, our analysis shows that the economic benefits have disproportionately and favorably benefitted Umatilla residents through property taxes, job creation, and support industries over other Oregon counties. These economic benefits include Strategic Investment Programs (SIPs), an estimated $500 million in capital investments, $1.4-3.5 million² paid in annual royalty payments to private landowners and $1.7³ million in property tax payments.

Our experience demonstrates that in addition to the annual benefits associated with property tax payments, renewable energy facility development and operation helps rural communities diversify their economic activities. Wind turbine operation is compatible with many
agricultural activities, enabling local landowners to benefit from the reliable secondary source of income provided through annual lease payments. Improvements in service roads enable county emergency response units to respond faster to dangerous situations. Wind energy construction and operation also create permanent jobs and economic opportunities for the businesses and local contractors they support, as well as the result of school improvements and county services from increased economic activities stimulated by renewable energy development.

If the Board of Commissioners adopts the recommendations made by the Planning Commission to the Wind Power Generation Facility siting standards (HHH), it is our opinion that further development of wind farms in Umatilla County will be greatly impaired. Passing these standards as they are currently proposed will likely also threaten a portion of the 203 MW of approved wind projects and an additional 400 MW of renewable energy that is currently in permitting. This would greatly diminish the future economic opportunities that could be realized through renewable energy development. And while our aim is not to offer statements on residents’ concerns, our goal is provide these reports to ensure that the Board of Commissioners has the best available information at hand as you reach your final decision on the HHH amendments.

We appreciate the opportunity to provide the Board of Commissioners with these comments and to directly address concerns related to renewable energy. If you have any questions about these documents or desire additional information, please don’t hesitate to contact RNP. Thank you for your efforts to responsibly develop wind energy in Umatilla County.

Sincerely,

Lauren Prince
Policy Associate
Renewable Northwest Project
917 SW Oak Street
Portland, Oregon 97205

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ii Direct communication with Umatilla County Assessor.