



John Muir Chapter

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Support SB 185 / AB 256, Uniform Wind Siting Standards Before the Senate Committee on Commerce, Utilities, Energy, and Rail and the Assembly Committee on Energy and Utilities

By Jim Connors, Volunteer Lobbyist, Sierra Club-John Muir Chapter
05/12/2009, 11:00 am, 411 South, State Capitol

Thank you for accepting comments today on behalf of the 15,000 members of the Sierra Club- John Muir Chapter in Wisconsin. The Sierra Club urges you to vote for SB 185 concerning the development of science-based, uniform wind siting standards. SB 185 calls for the creation of fair, statewide standards for the development of clean, renewable wind energy in our state.

Reducing the threat of global warming to our environment and economy is the number one priority issue of the John Muir Chapter. In order to reduce global warming, we must reduce Wisconsin's over-reliance on fossil fuels such as coal, which emits millions of tons of greenhouse gases into our atmosphere each year. Investing in renewables, including wind, solar, biomass and geothermal energy, and expanding energy efficiency and conservation programs, are integral to effectively addressing this problem.

As a member of the Governor's Global Warming Task Force, we are now working hard to implement the recommendations released last year, including wind siting reform (pg 107). Wind siting standards are critically needed in Wisconsin in order to fairly resolve impasses that are currently stalling the development of over 600 MW of wind power operating capacity. These include small, distributed wind power projects that help small farmers to remain on their land during these challenging economic times.

Failing to develop wind siting standards is an option that would not benefit the state of Wisconsin. The federal government, with its commitment to addressing global warming, may be in a position to develop policies that supercede the authority of state and local governments that lack these renewable energy standards. The lack of uniform wind siting regulation will also force WI utilities to import renewable energy from out of state to meet current and enhanced Renewable Portfolio Standards. This will mean more transmission lines and less green, family supporting jobs for Wisconsin workers.

No energy source comes without drawbacks, but we feel that impacts of the responsible development of wind energy are far less than the massive negative impacts of global warming pollution. The Sierra Club further believes that potential negative impacts to wildlife of wind energy systems can be substantially mitigated through careful siting, cooperation and communication between developers and stakeholders, and the use of modern technology.

As a grassroots organization, the John Muir Chapter is pleased to see that this bill will allow local units of government to review wind energy projects (under 100 MW). Uniform statewide standards that will be developed as a result of the passage of SB 185 will address issues of concern to local communities, including visual appearance, setback distances, decibel levels, and interference with radio, television and telephone signals. The John Muir Chapter is also reassured to see that SB 185 includes opportunities for stakeholders to provide input on uniform statewide wind energy standards, and mechanisms for appeals are available.

In summary, we hope you will support this common sense legislation, which will allow Wisconsin to start down the path towards a renewable energy future.