

Letter to the Editor: Topeka Capital Journal

I found Kyle Wetzel's editorial in the Friday, August 16, edition of the Topeka Capital Journal inaccurate and insulting. The title of his editorial, "Flint Hills are critical resource", was correct, but his rationale went downhill from there.

He labeled those of us who believe the Flint Hills should not be compromised by industrial wind development as Flint Hills *detractors*. I found that an odd way to characterize someone like me, since I've always prided myself as a Flint Hills *attractor*. I have used my ranch, for example, to promote the Flint Hills by hosting Prairie Women's Adventures and Retreat, Homestead Ranch Guest Programs, Symphony on the Prairie, and Brass on the Bluestem. We *detractors* have also promoted the tallgrass prairie by implementing sound range management on our ranches. I would not characterize us as environmentalists, as Mr. Wetzel did, but rather responsible stewards of a very unique and beautiful landscape.

Mr. Wetzel was correct when he said that wind power does not pollute the air, ground or water, produce radioactive waste, or depend upon strip mining of the earth. That's why I rely solely on renewable energy to power my ranch. However, that doesn't mean utility-scale wind production is without environmental impacts. Mr. Wetzel's statement that Flint Hills wind farms would not fragment the tallgrass prairie is just not true. We, including ranchers, sportsmen/women, range and wildlife ecologists, are concerned how hundreds, perhaps thousands, of 35-story tall and taller (350' plus) wind turbines would spoil the Flint Hills, both physically and psychologically. Certainly, clusters of these 200-ton giants scattered throughout the last landscape of tallgrass prairie is not the kind of green energy I would expect Kansans to support. The reality, not a misguided belief, is that this is industrial development, and will entail a maze of roads, quarrying down 30 feet or so to anchor each turbine, and miles of trenched powerlines. Because the turbines and towers have to be trucked in one piece at a time, the native prairie will be crisscrossed innumerable times by heavy construction traffic. To give you an idea, about 50 truck loads of concrete would be required to fill each quarried hole to anchor-down each turbine. We still haven't been told where all the quarried rock would go.

Are we so-called *detractors* short-sighted and selfish for wanting to protect this vanishing ecosystem? Not hardly. We believe wind energy is great and should be a part of our national energy plan. In fact, we see a bright and unchallenged future for wind development in Kansas, as long as wind developers and utility companies act responsibly. But "damming" up

the last expanse of tallgrass prairie in the nation is not, in my view, responsible. All we want is for the wind developers to move their project sites to crop fields and other already altered landscapes. I want to reiterate that this is not an anti-wind issue but rather a siting issue. I thought the statement by the Kansas Natural Heritage Inventory said it best: "It is ironic that a green energy endeavor has chosen one of the most ecologically significant areas in the Great Plains for development. Few large areas of native vegetation remain in Kansas and neighboring Plains states. Less environmentally sensitive choices for wind power development exist in abundance."

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