

Letter to the Editor,

5/28/04

Many people have been asking me about the Wind and Prairie Task Force (WPTF) and how the meetings are going, what the recommendations are, etc., so I thought perhaps this would be a good way to give a brief summary of where the WPTF is and what has been happening.

Since Governor Sebelius requested that the WPTF be formed in January, we have met once or twice every month. The WPTF is comprised of individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, so there has been a lot of good input from the members. We have also had a number of speakers that have presented background information on topics related to the Flint Hills/Tallgrass Prairie and wind energy. The minutes of these meetings, presentations, and background materials can be found on the SERCC web site, or by typing: **Wind/Prairie Task Force** onto your Internet search engine.

Two Public Forums were held to share some of the information we had received, ideas we were working on, and to give the public a chance to have input into the process. Public opinions were also encouraged via email and letters. A summary of those opinions and input by Jerry Lonergan will be in the final report, and I have copies of most of them if anyone is interested in reading them. Jerry Lonergan's summary concluded that, "The *vast majority* of comments were from those opposing wind energy development in the Flint Hills. There was also opposition expressed that specifically mentioned other land sites in parts of the state – Cheyenne Bottoms, Red Hills, and Smoky Hills."

The WPTF as a whole has agreed on a number of points such as some siting guidelines, wind lease recommendations, land trust and conservation easements, tourism funding and research, transmission expansion, and the need to focus on the wind development issue in the long term (10 or more years), rather than the short term (1 to 2 years).

The entire WPTF agrees on the fact that the Flint Hills/Tallgrass Prairie and other native grasslands in Kansas are unique and threatened ecosystems, with less than 4 % of the original native Tallgrass Prairie remaining in North America. We also agree on the fact that siting and developmental procedures are needed to provide for responsible stewardship of the land. The divergence in agreement comes with what types of procedures are recommended and how they are to be implemented. The WPTF has decided to submit two Options to the Governor to provide her with a variety of ideas and recommendations for addressing the issue.

Option A recommends that uniform and consistent policy and procedures be developed and would authorize a state or regional regulation of wind energy development, much like the oil and gas industries are regulated now. It also recommends that no wind energy development take place within the Flint Hills as shown in the TNC Intact Prairie map with a 7-mile buffer. Option A calls for a minimum yearlong moratorium while the issue is studied and standards are put into place.

Option B also calls for mapping out critical areas of the Flint Hills/Tallgrass Prairie and recommends guidelines for development, but leaves the implementation of the guidelines as voluntary, much like the system that is in effect now.

These Options will go to the Governor next week where she and her staff will evaluate them. She may choose either Option, or she may choose to combine them in some manner. Eventually, her recommendations will be made public. I believe the entire report will also be on the SERCC web site at some point.

This has been a very complex issue with many factors to consider. I want to take this opportunity to thank all of those, whatever their viewpoint, who have taken the time to express their opinion and have some input into this process, whether it was a personal conversation, letter, email, attendance at an informational meeting, or taking part in the WPTF Public Forums. Democracy does not work in a void or without input.

This issue will not be resolved next week, or next month, and probably not even next year. Please stay involved and informed. As I have often stated, this is not a personal or a one-site issue, it is a regional issue on land use that will affect the Flint Hills landscape and it's people for generations to come.

Thank You,

Rose Z. Bacon