

Coal River residents suggest wind farm over mining

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RALEIGH COUNTY COMMISSION

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Wind farming or strip mining? Which energy extraction method should be used on Coal River Mountain?

Residents of Clear Fork, Marsh Fork and other Raleigh County areas, with the support of environmental and community organizations such as Coal River Mountain Watch, the Ohio Valley Environmental Coalition, Appalachian Voices and the Sierra Club, asked the Raleigh County Commission Tuesday to support a proposed wind farm, which they say offers more long-term economic, social and environmental benefits to the county.

"I live in the west end of the county, which has been heavily impacted by coal mining," Lorelei Scarbro of Rock Creek said. "Our concern today is our homes, our environment and the sustainability of the environment."

Scarbro says she owns 10 acres that are at risk due to four massive strip mining permits for Coal River Mountain that would level 6,600 acres and lead to the construction of 19 valley fills, 14 of which would impact the Sycamore Creek watershed.

"These permits haven't been issued yet," she said. "These mines would be at the heads of Horse Creek, Dry Creek and Rock Creek, and will surround nearly the entire length of Sycamore Creek, which is considered to be the most pristine stream in the area."

Scarbro says many residents living in the proposed strip mining area favor an alternative — wind power.

"We want Raleigh County to be in the forefront of renewable energy sources," she said. "We are asking the Raleigh County Commission to support a proposed wind farm for Coal River Mountain."

Rory McIlmoil of Coal River Mountain Watch told commissioners that in the latter months of 2006, David Orr, a professor at Oberlin College in Ohio, worked with Appalachian Voice to commission a study of the wind potential on Coal River Mountain.

(Register Herald Coal River residents suggest wind farm cont...)

“The study was conducted by WindLogics, a nationally recognized wind modeling and development firm, and it showed that the ridges along Coal River Mountain exhibited strong Class 4 to Class 7 average annual wind speeds,” McIlmoil said. “It was found that Coal River Mountain has enough wind potential and land area to accommodate 220 two-megawatt wind turbines. Calculations showed that this was enough energy to power over 150,000 homes or over 90,000 total electricity customers, including residential, commercial and industrial units.”

McIlmoil claims production estimates in the strip mining permits show that mining operations will last for only 14 years.

“Once the coal is gone, there will be no more jobs available, the water will be contaminated, many of the residents will have moved out or been bought out, and the forest, another source of potential jobs and revenue, will be gone for decades to come, as will the possibility of producing clean wind energy on the scale that is currently available,” he said.

Commission president Pat Reed said the county is always interested in supporting viable economic development projects and suggested the residents and organizations interested in the wind farm proposal take it to the 4-C Economic Development Authority.

“They are an organization that may be able to help you with this proposal,” she said.

Commissioner John Humphrey asked if there were any wind development companies interested in the proposal.

“So far, we have been in contact with two interested companies, and it also would have the strong support of both local and national organizations interested in supporting sustainable community development initiatives in Appalachia,” McIlmoil said. “Not only would the development of a Coal River Mountain wind farm be more economically beneficial in the long term than the proposed strip mining would, it would result in the preservation of the mountain for the development of other economic alternatives, such as tourism, sustainable timber harvesting, hunting and fishing, and providing the resources for local craft and furniture production. Raleigh County could ultimately serve as a model for other counties in southern West Virginia facing a post-coal future.”

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