

Rail Tie Wind Project Virtual Public Hearing Transcript April 28, 2021

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00:00:49.920 --> 00:01:03.870

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Welcome to the Rail Tie Wind Project virtual public hearing for April 28, 2021. I am Sarah Lupis, project coordinator for the Rail Tie Wind Project at SWCA Environmental Consultants and the facilitator for today's hearing.

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00:01:05.010 --> 00:01:09.000

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We're going to allow a few minutes for attendees to join the webinar and then we will begin.

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00:01:09.630 --> 00:01:16.350

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Please note that this meeting is being recorded, please also note that, because this is a Zoom webinar, the chat function is disabled.

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00:01:17.190 --> 00:01:29.220

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): If you're having any technical issues, please use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to request assistance. For those on the phone, please dial star-nine to indicate that you need technology support.

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00:04:56.760 --> 00:05:13.350

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): For those of you who have just joined, welcome to the Rail Tie Wind Project virtual public hearing for April 28, 2021. I'm Sarah Lupis, project coordinator for the Rail Tie Wind Project at SWCA Environmental Consultants and the facilitator for today's hearing.

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00:05:14.430 --> 00:05:18.720

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We're just going to allow a few more minutes for attendees to join the webinar and then we will begin.

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00:05:19.470 --> 00:05:26.550

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Please note that this meeting is being recorded, please also note that, because this is a Zoom webinar the chat function is disabled.

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00:05:27.360 --> 00:05:38.430

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): If you're having any technical issues, please use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to request assistance. For those on the phone, please dial star-nine to indicate that you need technology support.

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00:10:06.510 --> 00:10:18.060

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): It looks like we probably have most participants in attendance, so we will now begin our program. Once again, welcome to the Rail Tie Wind Project virtual public hearing for April 28, 2021.

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00:10:18.690 --> 00:10:26.040

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): I'm Sarah Lupis, project coordinator for the Rail Tie Wind Project at SWCA Environmental Consultants and the facilitator for today's hearing.

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00:10:27.420 --> 00:10:35.130

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): I'd like to start by giving you an overview of the agenda. We're going to start by reviewing the virtual meeting technology, and then we will introduce our panel.

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00:10:35.790 --> 00:10:44.760

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We will watch a 20-minute video to give you some background on the Project, the NEPA process, and the public comment period, and then we will start the public hearing portion of today's meeting.

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00:10:46.440 --> 00:10:53.190

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): I also wanted to give you an idea of what to expect for the public hearing portion of this meeting, because that is really the purpose of this event.

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00:10:53.820 --> 00:11:02.490

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): To ensure that everyone who wants to has the opportunity to speak during the public hearing portion of the meeting, you will have the opportunity to speak for 3 minutes at a time.

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00:11:03.360 --> 00:11:13.080

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The queue will stay open until 3:30 pm Mountain Time, or for approximately 90 minutes. At the end of that time, we will not take any more signups to speak.

16

00:11:14.070 --> 00:11:18.840

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The meeting will continue until all commenters in the queue have had the opportunity to be heard.

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00:11:19.590 --> 00:11:33.510

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We welcome you to comment more than once. You will have 3 minutes to deliver your comment during your turn and then you may enter the queue to speak again until the queue is closed at 3:30 pm. I will get into more details about how to join the queue in a few minutes.

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00:11:35.520 --> 00:11:39.360

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Now let's review the Zoom webinar technology we will be using during today's meeting.

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00:11:40.830 --> 00:11:53.790

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): To adjust your view, you can click on view options at the top, to show the view or, excuse me, to show video at the top or side by side. You can also toggle between speaker and gallery view in the upper right.

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00:11:54.990 --> 00:12:04.140

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We recommend the side-by-side and speaker view when a screen is being shared. If the screen is not being shared, side-by-side and gallery view is recommended.

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00:12:06.300 --> 00:12:13.440

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): At the end of the video presentation, you will be invited to use the Raise-Hand function to join the queue to give your verbal comments.

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00:12:14.100 --> 00:12:25.890

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): If you're joining on a computer, the Raise-Hand button is at the bottom of your screen. If you're joining from your mobile phone, the button is also at the bottom of your screen and you may need to tap the screen to see this menu.

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00:12:26.940 --> 00:12:33.570

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): For those joining by telephone, you will use, you will dial star-nine to be added to the speaking queue.

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00:12:36.120 --> 00:12:42.510

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): After the video, you will be, you will also be invited to use the Q&A button to type out questions you wish to ask the panel.

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00:12:43.380 --> 00:12:53.310

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Questions will be held until all speakers have finished giving comments. At that time, questions and the panel's responses will be displayed on the screen and read out loud.

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00:12:54.390 --> 00:13:00.000

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The Q&A button should only be used for questions. It is not an official channel for submitting comments.

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00:13:00.600 --> 00:13:12.210

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Written comments may be submitted via email, the online form, or through the mail, as the video will describe. Following the hearing, questions and responses will also be posted on the Project website.

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00:13:15.600 --> 00:13:19.860

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): At this time, I'd like to invite the members of our panel to introduce themselves.

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00:13:27.510 --> 00:13:43.440

Mark Wieringa (WAPA): This is Mark Wieringa with Western Area Power Administration, Lakewood, Colorado, office. I'm the NEPA project manager for this Project. My role is to direct and guide the process and the preparation of the EIS.

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00:13:47.460 --> 00:13:52.140

Lisa Meyer (WAPA): Good afternoon. I'm Lisa Meyer, headquarters archaeologist for WAPA.

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00:13:57.420 → 00:14:03.030

Tim Langer (WAPA): Good afternoon, my name is Tim Langer. I'm the biologist for the Headquarters Office at Western Area Power Administration.

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00:14:05.280 --> 00:14:09.480

Eric Barendsen (WAPA): And I'm Eric Barendsen. I'm a public affairs specialist with WAPA.

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00:14:11.520 --> 00:14:12.840

David Fetter (SWCA): Hello, I'm David Fetter.

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00:14:12.870 --> 00:14:22.170

David Fetter (SWCA): Senior project manager with SWCA Environmental Consultants. SWCA is assisting WAPA in the preparation of the EIS.

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00:14:24.090 --> 00:14:27.660

Krista Perry (SWCA): And I'm Krista Perry, the assistant project manager, for SWCA.

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00:14:30.720 --> 00:14:35.250

Jennifer Wynn (SWCA): I am Jenn Wynn, and I'll be readying the Zoom for SWCA for this meeting.

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00:14:38.970 --> 00:14:46.290

John Kuba (ConnectGen): My name is John Kuba. I'm the director of environmental affairs for ConnectGen. ConnectGen is the company developing the Rail Tie Wind Project.

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00:14:50.580 --> 00:14:55.920

Amanda MacDonald (ConnectGen): Hi everyone. I'm Amanda McDonald and I'm the project manager for the Rail Tie Wind Project with ConnectGen.

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00:15:02.430 --> 00:15:09.570

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you, panel. Next, we have prepared a short video for you that summarizes the draft environmental impact statement...

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00:15:09.960 --> 00:15:24.090

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): ...the National Environmental Policy Act process for the Project, and the public comment period that we are currently in, including how to submit your comments. After the video, we will review how you can offer your comments today and start the public hearing.

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00:15:35.790 --> 00:15:42.150

Hello, this is Mark Wieringa, Western Area Power Administration's NEPA document manager for the proposed Rail Tie Wind Project.

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00:15:43.080 --> 00:15:49.560

Western Area Power Administration, or WAPA, released a draft environmental impact statement, or EIS

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00:15:49.980 --> 00:15:56.940

for the interconnection of ConnectGen Albany County's proposed Rail Tie Wind Project on April 2, 2021.

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00:15:57.720 --> 00:16:07.110

To ensure the public has an opportunity to provide input, we will be accepting public comments until Monday, May 17, 2021, including in writing

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00:16:07.740 --> 00:16:16.800

(online and email are preferred), or verbally during public hearings. Time for speaking during the hearings is limited, and written comments are encouraged.

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00:16:17.370 --> 00:16:35.220

All comments will be considered as the draft EIS is revised and will be preserved in the administrative record. This presentation will provide information on the proposed Project, the draft environmental impact statement, and how you can participate in the 45-day public comment period.

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00:16:38.820 --> 00:16:50.850

WAPA is evaluating an interconnection request submitted by ConnectGen to connect the Rail Tie Wind Project to WAPA's existing Ault-Craig 345-kilovolt transmission line in Albany County, Wyoming.

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00:16:51.840 --> 00:17:08.370

ConnectGen's goals and objectives for developing the Rail Tie Wind Project include responding to increasing market demand for sources of renewable energy. Demand is primarily driven by the falling costs of wind- and solar-generated electricity and state clean energy mandates.

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00:17:09.390 --> 00:17:27.750

The 26,000-acre Project Area, shown here outlined in red, is approximately 20 miles south of Laramie, Wyoming, near Tie Siding, and just north of the Colorado-Wyoming state line. The Project Area is bisected by U.S. Highway 287 and two existing transmission lines.

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00:17:28.800 --> 00:17:45.360

Within the Project Area, areas shaded white and blue represent private and state land. Outside the Project Area, areas shaded green, yellow, and orange represent Federal land, including U.S. Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management land, and county land.

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00:17:46.620 --> 00:18:03.420

The portion of the Project Area west of U.S. Highway 287 was considered for a wind generation project by Shell WindEnergy between 2010 and 2014. That proposed project was suspended when Shell Corporate decided to exit the wind energy sector entirely.

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00:18:05.100 --> 00:18:16.230

The proposed Project would be owned and operated by ConnectGen and would include between 84 and 149 wind turbines with a generating capacity of up to 504 megawatts.

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00:18:17.040 --> 00:18:28.140

In addition to the turbines, the proposed Project would include access roads, collection lines, substations, control buildings, meteorological towers, and other related infrastructure.

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00:18:30.000 --> 00:18:42.420

The total number of wind turbines would depend on the turbine model selected and final design. ConnectGen is currently considering several turbine models with capacities between 3 megawatts and 6 megawatts each.

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00:18:43.320 --> 00:18:50.850

Regardless of the turbine model selected, turbines would be sited within 1,000-foot siting corridors, shown here in green.

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00:18:51.780 --> 00:19:05.010

Other Project components, such as access roads, collection lines, substations, control buildings, a meteorological tower, and other related infrastructure would be located in the non-turbine siting corridors shown here in blue.

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00:19:06.360 --> 00:19:19.170

If WAPA decides to approve the interconnection request after the environmental process is complete, WAPA would construct, own, operate, and maintain a switchyard to control power flow into WAPA's existing transmission line...

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00:19:20.040 --> 00:19:30.660

...that crosses the southern portion of the Project Area. If WAPA decides to deny the interconnection request, the Project would not be allowed to connect to the existing WAPA transmission system.

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00:19:31.860 --> 00:19:44.460

While this would not preclude the Project from being constructed and connected to a non-WAPA-managed transmission system, for the purposes of analysis, the draft EIS assumes that in that case, the Project would not be built.

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00:19:45.750 --> 00:19:51.870

WAPA's decision is framed by Federal Energy Regulatory Commission open access to transmission orders.

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00:19:52.530 --> 00:20:05.700

These orders generally require utilities to make unused transmission capacity available as long as an interconnection does not cause system problems, and the requestor funds any necessary system upgrades.

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00:20:07.680 --> 00:20:20.280

ConnectGen is the proponent of the Rail Tie Wind Project. ConnectGen is an independent renewable energy company focused on the development of greenfield wind, solar, and energy storage projects across the United States.

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00:20:21.000 --> 00:20:33.450

They are headquartered in Houston, Texas, and backed by Quantum Energy Partners. ConnectGen has requested to interconnect the Rail Tie Wind Project to WAPA's existing Ault-Craig 345-kV transmission line.

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00:20:34.650 --> 00:20:50.490

ConnectGen's environmental contractor, Tetra Tech, Inc., has provided permitting support and conducted numerous technical studies regarding the resources that were evaluated in the draft EIS. These technical reports are available on WAPA's website for this Project.

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00:20:51.780 --> 00:21:06.060

WAPA determined that granting the request for an interconnection to its transmission system, together with ConnectGen's proposed Project considered as a connected action, would constitute a major Federal action requiring the preparation of an EIS.

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00:21:07.260 --> 00:21:26.670

Under the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, also called NEPA, WAPA is the lead agency and, as such, WAPA is responsible for preparing the EIS. WAPA is working with SWCA Environmental Consultants, the third-party environmental contractor supporting WAPA in the NEPA process.

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00:21:27.750 --> 00:21:36.780

SWCA's role is to prepare the EIS under WAPA's guidance, verify the data and information used, and identify any data gaps.

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00:21:38.520 --> 00:21:46.620

Hello, this is David Fetter, project manager at SWCA Environmental Consultants. SWCA is supporting WAPA in the NEPA process.

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00:21:47.130 --> 00:21:57.840

I'm going to summarize the impact analysis presented in the draft EIS. The draft EIS analyzed the potential for significant impacts on 15 different resource categories.

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00:21:58.320 --> 00:22:05.340

These resources were chosen based on the comments WAPA received from the public and cooperating agencies during the scoping process.

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00:22:06.210 --> 00:22:19.770

An issues-based analysis was used to evaluate impact. As you review the draft EIS, you will notice that for each resource, issue questions are asked and responses to each one are provided. The issue statements or questions were based on scoping input.

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00:22:21.660 --> 00:22:26.760

The draft EIS concluded that there would be significant impacts for aesthetics and visual resources.

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00:22:27.420 --> 00:22:42.030

The other resources analyzed in the draft EIS could be impacted to varying degrees but would not experience significant impacts. For more information on the findings of no significance for the remaining 14 resources, please refer to Chapter 3 of the draft EIS.

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00:22:44.730 --> 00:22:59.790

Impacts to visual resources were analyzed in a viewshed that extended 30 miles beyond the Project Area, as illustrated by the green circle in this map. The purple shading on this map represents where the Project's wind turbines would be visible within that analysis area.

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00:23:00.870 --> 00:23:10.890

The impact analysis for visual resources also relied on professional visual simulations prepared from a selection of different key observation points—or KOPs—

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00:23:11.340 --> 00:23:20.760

that represent viewing locations where the Project would be visible from both stationary platforms like residential areas, tourist sites, or recreation sites,

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00:23:21.210 --> 00:23:32.640

as well as linear platforms like highways or major roadways. This map shows the key observation points that were identified to represent the most critical viewpoints in the analysis area.

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00:23:36.630 --> 00:23:44.520

Impacts to visual resources were evaluated based on degrees of visual change, which are specific criteria for assessing changes to a viewshed.

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00:23:45.180 --> 00:23:54.660

In assessing degrees of visual change, current conditions were compared to the conditions expected under the proposed Project with both the minimum and maximum turbine heights.

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00:23:55.290 --> 00:24:04.140

Under the minimum turbine height scenario, there would be more, shorter turbines. Under the maximum turbine height scenario, there would be fewer, taller turbines.

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00:24:04.950 --> 00:24:13.560

Degrees of visual change in the analysis area ranges from none to strong and consider distance from the Project and intervening topography.

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00:24:14.580 --> 00:24:24.330

The degree of visual change for travelers, tourists, and residents ranged from none to strong, depending on distance from the Project and the key observation point.

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00:24:25.260 --> 00:24:40.890

Overall, the degrees of visual change for minimum turbine height would be moderate to strong from 54 percent of key observation points compared to 76 percent of key observation points associated with the maximum turbine height.

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00:24:44.730 --> 00:24:53.550

For example, this picture simulates what the view of the Project would look like from the Ames Monument key observation point in the middle of the day,

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00:24:54.060 --> 00:25:05.190

if you were facing southwest looking out from the western edge of the monument structure toward the Project Area, using the maximum turbine height scenario.

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00:25:11.100 --> 00:25:20.640

The draft EIS concludes that the impacts to visual resources would be significant. Specifically, that means that the landscape would appear substantially to severely altered.

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00:25:21.360 --> 00:25:36.750

Project components would introduce form, line, color, texture, or scale uncommon in the landscape and would be visually prominent to dominant in the landscape; the turbines would attract and demand attention; and would dominate the visual setting in many cases.

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00:25:39.660 --> 00:25:46.350

The draft EIS also analyzed impacts to wildlife species that are known or have the potential to occur in the Project Area.

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00:25:47.070 --> 00:25:52.260

Impacts to habitat, individual animals, and wildlife populations were considered.

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00:25:52.950 --> 00:26:02.490

The draft EIS concluded that while the proposed Project would affect habitats and individual plants and animals, populations would not be significantly impacted.

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00:26:03.150 --> 00:26:11.880

Those impacts would be temporary—generally ending with the construction effort and finally with decommissioning and site reclamation at the end of the Project’s life.

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00:26:14.010 --> 00:26:19.050

The draft EIS also analyzed impacts to cultural resources and Native American concerns.

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00:26:20.040 --> 00:26:29.790

Compliance with Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act is triggered when a Federal agency determines that its action has the potential to affect historic property listed

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00:26:30.090 --> 00:26:34.020

or eligible for inclusion in the National Register Of Historic Places.

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00:26:34.770 --> 00:26:47.310

WAPA is working with the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Office and other interested parties to develop a programmatic agreement that takes into account the effects that the proposed Project would have on historic properties

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00:26:47.670 --> 00:26:52.200

and includes a detailed process for establishing measures that would mitigate those effects.

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00:26:53.160 --> 00:26:57.090

Where it is determined that the Project would impact cultural properties or resources

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00:26:57.450 --> 00:27:10.110

a historic properties treatment plan would be developed to resolve the adverse effects of the undertaking, consistent with the Secretary of Interior Standards and Guidelines for Archaeology and Historic Preservation.

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00:27:12.180 --> 00:27:19.770

Next, I am going to summarize the National Environmental Policy Act—or NEPA—process for the Project and options for public participation.

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00:27:20.610 --> 00:27:25.380

ConnectGen's interconnection request triggered the need for NEPA review because the interconnection,

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00:27:25.800 --> 00:27:34.140

together with ConnectGen's wind farm considered as a connected action, would constitute a major Federal action requiring the preparation of an EIS.

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00:27:35.100 --> 00:27:43.320

We are currently in the 45-day review of the draft EIS. The draft EIS review period will end on Monday, May 17, 2021.

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00:27:44.160 --> 00:27:54.660

At the end of this review period, WAPA will revise the draft EIS based on feedback from the public, cooperating agencies, and consulting tribes and publish a final EIS.

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00:27:55.650 --> 00:28:04.230

The final EIS will be available for review for a minimum of 30 days, after which WAPA will publish a Record of Decision for the proposed Project.

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00:28:04.950 --> 00:28:09.810

If WAPA decides to approve the interconnection request after the NEPA process is complete,

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00:28:10.290 --> 00:28:18.270

WAPA would construct, own, operate, and maintain a switch yard within the Project Area to control power flow onto their existing transmission line.

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00:28:19.140 --> 00:28:26.370

If WAPA decides to deny the interconnection request, the Project would not be allowed to connect to the existing WAPA transmission system.

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00:28:27.300 --> 00:28:40.290

While this would not preclude the Project from being constructed and connected to a non-WAPA-managed transmission system, for the purposes of this analysis, the EIS assumes that, in that case, the Project would not be built.

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00:28:41.400 --> 00:28:49.320

Cooperating agencies include those Federal, State, and local agencies that have jurisdiction by law and/or special expertise.

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00:28:50.070 --> 00:28:54.750

The role of cooperating agencies may include participating in the scoping process,

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00:28:55.140 --> 00:29:09.720

developing information and environmental analyses at the request of the lead agency, and providing support staff to enhance the lead agency's interdisciplinary capacity. This is a list of the cooperating agencies currently involved in the NEPA process.

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00:29:12.450 --> 00:29:21.630

WAPA is also conducting formal consultation with interested tribes on a government-to-government level according to Section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act.

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00:29:22.410 --> 00:29:33.120

WAPA has invited 16 federally recognized tribes to participate in the Section 106 consultation process; to-date, the six tribes on the screen have accepted WAPA's invitation.

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00:29:33.840 --> 00:29:44.640

There are multiple ways to submit comments on the draft EIS. Written comments are preferred, and you are encouraged to send your comments via email or use the online form provided on the Project website.

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00:29:45.450 --> 00:29:58.530

While we can receive comments through the mail, please note that access to WAPA's Headquarters Office is limited because of the COVID-19 pandemic, so written comments mailed to the WAPA Headquarters Office may be delayed in reaching the Project Team.

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00:30:01.470 --> 00:30:10.350

The email address, web address for the online form, and mailing address are displayed on the screen. This information is also available on the Project website.

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00:30:11.010 --> 00:30:16.140

Written comments submitted electronically via the online form or email are preferred.

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00:30:16.770 --> 00:30:29.070

WAPA will accept public input in anytime during the NEPA process; however, for your comments to be fully considered when the draft EIS is revised, they must be submitted by Monday, May 17, 2021.

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00:30:29.940 --> 00:30:40.200

The best comments provide the Team with information to use, or to act upon when revising the EIS. Effective comments are specific to the Rail Tie Wind Project.

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00:30:40.920 --> 00:30:48.240

They relate to analysis, especially the thoroughness and technical accuracy of the impact analyses presented in the draft EIS.

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00:30:48.900 --> 00:30:59.370

They include suggested changes, additional sources, or alternate analysis methodologies, and when possible, they reference a section or page number of the draft EIS.

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00:31:01.020 --> 00:31:10.710

To merit a written response, comments must be submitted in writing via either paper or electronic format or provided verbally during the hearing portion of the draft EIS meetings.

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00:31:11.250 --> 00:31:18.570

They must be substantive and received by Monday, May 17. Substantive comments do one or more of the following:

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00:31:19.230 --> 00:31:27.540

Question the accuracy of information in the draft EIS, including the basis for the question along with any accurate and defensible replacement information;

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00:31:28.320 --> 00:31:39.090

question the adequacy of, or methodology for, or assumptions used for the environmental analysis, including the basis for the question and any actions that would solve the commenter's issue;

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00:31:39.900 --> 00:31:50.940

present new information relevant to the analysis; or present reasonable alternatives other than those analyzed in the draft EIS that also meet the lead agency's purpose and need.

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00:31:54.120 --> 00:32:01.380

Comments that are not substantive generally contain only opinion or preferences. These will be included as part of the Project record.

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00:32:02.040 --> 00:32:14.490

They will not, however, receive a formal response from WAPA. Comments that are not considered substantive include the following: comments in favor of or against the proposed Project with no additional substantive content;

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00:32:15.330 --> 00:32:22.650

comments that only agree or disagree with WAPA policy or resource decisions and that do not include justification or supporting data;

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00:32:23.430 --> 00:32:41.160

comments that do not pertain to the 26,000-acre Project Area or the Project itself; or comments that take the form of vague, open-ended questions. That concludes our presentation. We appreciate your interest in participation and the Rail Tie Wind Project and the ongoing NEPA process.

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00:32:50.910 --> 00:32:53.670

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We will now begin the public hearing portion of our meeting.

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00:32:54.180 --> 00:33:07.860

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): As a reminder, you will have the opportunity to speak for 3 minutes at a time, the queue will stay open until 3:30 pm Mountain Time, or for approximately the next 90 minutes. At the end of that time, we will not take any more signups to speak.

133

00:33:09.270 --> 00:33:24.690

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The meeting will continue until all commenters in the queue have had the opportunity to be heard. We welcome you to comment more than once. You will have 3 minutes to deliver your comment during your turn, and then you may enter the queue again until the queue is closed at 3:30 pm.

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00:33:26.880 --> 00:33:28.170

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We ask that you:

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00:33:32.940 --> 00:33:36.810

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): say and spell your first and last name at the start of your comment.

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00:33:37.590 --> 00:33:47.040

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Please refrain from questions or comments that contain vulgar or abusive language, personal attacks of any kind, offensive terms that target specific groups.

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00:33:47.880 --> 00:33:57.960

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Please be respectful to participants, presenters, and panelists. Please remember participants may be joining from locations where family members and children can hear what is being said.

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00:33:58.830 --> 00:34:04.170

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And please remember, this meeting is being recorded and your comments will be included in the Project record.

139

00:34:06.270 --> 00:34:13.440

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): You may now use the Raise-Hand function, or star-nine for those joining by phone, to join the queue to give verbal comments.

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00:34:14.040 --> 00:34:31.080

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): When it is your turn to speak, we will unmute you. Watch the onscreen timer to track when your 3 minutes is up. At the end of the 3 minutes, we will mute you and let the next speaker start their turn. I will announce speaker order as we go, and it will be posted in the chat.

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00:34:36.810 --> 00:34:40.410

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): I see that Connie W., your hand is raised.

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00:34:53.640 --> 00:34:54.510

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): You may begin.

143

00:34:55.260 --> 00:34:57.300

Connie Wilbert: Okay. Hi. Thank you.

144

00:34:58.620 --> 00:35:14.610

Connie Wilbert: My name is Connie Wilbert I am director of Sierra Club Wyoming Chapter. Let's see, my last name is spelled W-I-L-B-E-R-T and my first name is Connie C-O-N-N-I-E.

145

00:35:15.960 --> 00:35:24.990

Connie Wilbert: I'm just going to make very brief comments right now because we will be submitting more detailed written comments.

146

00:35:25.800 --> 00:35:39.090

Connie Wilbert: So, I just want to do a little high-level overview right now. First of all, I'll start by thanking you for holding this public meeting and giving residents an opportunity to comment on this Project.

147

00:35:41.700 --> 00:35:52.260

Connie Wilbert: I'll give you a bit of background on Sierra Club Wyoming. We have about 6,000 members and supporters statewide. We have read

148

00:35:52.890 --> 00:35:59.430

Connie Wilbert: the draft environmental impact statement and we have basically concluded

149

00:36:00.090 --> 00:36:11.310

Connie Wilbert: that while we recognize that commercial wind development, like almost any other kind of development, does affect the landscape and it does have impacts,

150

00:36:12.180 --> 00:36:20.010

Connie Wilbert: after reviewing the information in the draft environmental impact statement, we have concluded that the benefits of developing this Project

151

00:36:20.550 --> 00:36:34.860

Connie Wilbert: outweigh the relatively limited impacts of the Project and, in particular, I want to just speak to the to the visual and aesthetic impacts that were described in the presentation for just a moment.

152

00:36:35.820 --> 00:36:46.020

Connie Wilbert: Basically, one of the things that we looked at was balancing the impacts that this Project would have in an area that is already,

153

00:36:46.500 --> 00:36:56.010

Connie Wilbert: by many standards, quite well-developed, with a highway and a railroad and many rural subdivisions and so forth scattered throughout the Project Area.

154

00:36:56.520 --> 00:37:06.630

Connie Wilbert: And evaluating those impacts relative or, or kind of compared to developing a similar Project in a more remote

155

00:37:07.530 --> 00:37:18.420

Connie Wilbert: rural area and our conclusion was that the impacts in this location would be less. So that's part of our thinking, and I think I'll just stop

156

00:37:18.930 --> 00:37:34.440

Connie Wilbert: there, because, as I said, we will be submitting more substantive written comments later for your consideration. Thanks again for a very informative presentation and for providing this opportunity for folks to share their opinions.

157

00:37:37.470 --> 00:37:38.880

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

158

00:37:40.260 --> 00:37:45.780

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): It looks like the next speaker with a raised hand is Lynn Montoya. Lynn, you may begin.

159

00:38:04.170 → 00:38:04.890

Lynn Montoya: Can you hear me?

160

00:38:05.310 --> 00:38:06.000

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Yes, we can.

161

00:38:06.270 --> 00:38:08.550

Lynn Montoya: Okay, sorry I didn't.

162

00:38:08.640 --> 00:38:09.510

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): You're just fine.

163

00:38:09.810 --> 00:38:11.070

Lynn Montoya: But I click right but.

164

00:38:12.300 --> 00:38:27.450

Lynn Montoya: My name is Lynn Montoya, L-Y-N-N, and last name Montoya, M-O-N-T-O-Y-A. I am a resident of Albany County and I also am a business owner in the proposed area.

165

00:38:28.200 --> 00:38:52.530

Lynn Montoya: Based on the determination of the WAPA Team, considering the draft EIS that there would be significant visual impacts to residents of the Laramie area, visitors to the area, and possible future residents, I can only suggest the WAPA conclude that there should be a no

166

00:38:53.580 --> 00:38:57.000

Lynn Montoya: connection determination, thank you.

167

00:39:02.880 --> 00:39:04.200

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

168

00:39:08.550 --> 00:39:14.340

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder, you may continue to use the Raise-Hand function or star-nine

169

00:39:15.660 --> 00:39:22.380

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): to request to speak. Looks like we have up next will be Emma Clute. Emma, you may begin.

170

00:39:25.200 --> 00:39:26.430

Can you hear me all right?

171

00:39:27.630 --> 00:39:28.410

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Yes, go ahead.

172

00:39:28.680 --> 00:39:36.240

Emma Clute: Okay, my name is Emma Clute, spelled E-M-M-A C-L-U-T-E.

173

00:39:37.320 --> 00:40:02.400

Emma Clute: I am a resident of Albany County. I have lived here my whole life. And I am deeply concerned about this Project. In brief, I would suggest, and hope that WAPA would take a no-connection resolution for the Rail Tie Wind Project and, in addition to

174

00:40:04.890 --> 00:40:16.770

Emma Clute: the issues with the visual intrusions to the area, which I have to say is not inconsequential, given that we have tourism is such a huge part

175

00:40:17.250 --> 00:40:35.790

Emma Clute: of our economy here. I mean people come here because we have open spaces and the development to land that is involved in ranching you know erecting fences and things like that or putting a highway through is simply not comparable to the

176

00:40:37.050 --> 00:40:47.400

Emma Clute: disturbance that is involved in installing 150-some turbines. I'm also concerned about the quantity of fiberglass blades that will be produced

177

00:40:48.090 --> 00:41:02.130

Emma Clute: in this Project and the fact that those are going to go into our landfill. I'm concerned about what reclamation plans there are in 35 years and concerned about the relationship to the aquifer.

178

00:41:03.390 --> 00:41:07.020

Emma Clute: With all of this equipment that will be going into this area,

179

00:41:08.490 --> 00:41:23.340

Emma Clute: in the construction process. And I understand that the judgment of the EIS was that the impact to wildlife would not be that significant and would end at the end of the Project, but we're talking 35 years.

180

00:41:23.850 --> 00:41:33.090

Emma Clute: Which is a long Project, and that's long enough, I believe, for the different migratory herds to have to change their paths.

181

00:41:34.290 --> 00:41:35.190

Emma Clute: And so

182

00:41:36.390 --> 00:41:48.390

Emma Clute: I understand that when we zoom out and look at these things in terms of, you know, just abstract numbers, but they don't seem consequential. But for those of us who are going to be living here

183

00:41:48.840 --> 00:42:00.210

Emma Clute: and have elk wandering through our front yards already, these things do make a difference and so thank you very much for the opportunity to share our comments and express our concerns.

184

00:42:06.330 --> 00:42:14.220

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment, the next speaker is Susan Davis, and after that we'll hear from Terry O.

185

00:42:15.270 --> 00:42:16.770

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Susan, you may begin.

186

00:42:18.750 --> 00:42:20.940

Susan Davis: Good afternoon. Can you hear me?

187

00:42:21.720 --> 00:42:23.460

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Yes, we can. Thank you.

188

00:42:23.670 --> 00:42:30.330

Susan Davis: Great. My name is Susan Davis, S-U-S-A-N D-A-V-I-S . My home is west of

189

00:42:37.170 --> 00:42:41.790

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Susan, I think we lost your audio connection. Could you try again?

190

00:42:42.090 --> 00:42:44.370

Susan Davis: Okay, can you? Am I back on?

191

00:42:44.670 --> 00:42:45.270

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Yes, you are.

192

00:42:45.660 --> 00:42:47.280

Susan Davis: Okay, did you get my name?

193

00:42:48.570 --> 00:42:49.800

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Go ahead and start from the beginning.

194

00:42:50.340 --> 00:43:11.490

Susan Davis: My name is Susan Davis S-U-S-A-N D-A-V-I-S. My home is west of Tie Siding, and I wish to speak to you today because I am very concerned—extremely concerned—with the lack of regard for the danger of wildfire that this Project will create.

195

00:43:12.840 --> 00:43:26.190

Susan Davis: 213 homes are within 5 miles, radius, of this industrial site with these 675-foot towers, or even the shorter towers, there is no provision

196

00:43:26.940 --> 00:43:40.350

Susan Davis: in the draft for fire suppression systems on the turbine nacelles. It's proven that turbines not only attract lightning but create upward lightning during thunderstorms.

197

00:43:41.070 --> 00:43:50.910

Susan Davis: There is no fire department in our area. It is over 30 miles from some of the industrial site to Laramie, yet homes are within 5 miles of

198

00:43:52.650 --> 00:44:01.830

Susan Davis: these turbines. On the west side of 287, there's only one road for fire escape. Blockages could happen during construction.

199

00:44:02.490 --> 00:44:10.620

Susan Davis: These homes are contiguous with the Roosevelt, the forested foothills at the Roosevelt National Forest that leads into there.

200

00:44:11.430 --> 00:44:23.250

Susan Davis: It is my understanding that in our area, we cannot even get fire insurance any longer. Drought is normal in our area. The forests are filled with beetle-kill timber.

201

00:44:23.970 --> 00:44:42.810

Susan Davis: It is a critical situation if you think back to last summer. I want to remind you there's only one road out for those of us who are west of Tie Siding. If that is blocked by equipment, by blades, by road construction, we are trapped.

202

00:44:44.460 --> 00:44:55.140

Susan Davis: Once this Project has built, the natural prairie will be disturbed. Plant life will change; perennial plants that occupy the prairie now, which are more resistant to fire, will be destroyed.

203

00:44:55.710 --> 00:45:00.900

Susan Davis: In its place will grow the annual invasive cheatgrass, which is extremely flammable.

204

00:45:01.350 --> 00:45:08.490

Susan Davis: Additionally, cheatgrass is not suitable for wildlife consumption, then it will be the end to the mule deer and the elk herds.

205

00:45:08.940 --> 00:45:21.810

Susan Davis: But, most importantly, this industrial site is a hugely combustible area that is drought predisposed with the possibility of trapping a number of residents with no way to escape should a fire start.

206

00:45:22.650 --> 00:45:30.060

Susan Davis: Why would ConnectGen be allowed to intentionally plan such a devastating fire hazard in the area is my question for you.

207

00:45:30.780 --> 00:45:43.800

Susan Davis: This is not the right site, in my opinion, for an industrial wind facility. I appreciate your consideration of this. I truly am terrified of the possibility of fire in the area.

208

00:45:44.850 --> 00:45:45.300

Susan Davis: Thank you.

209

00:45:49.500 --> 00:45:55.740

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment. Next up, Terry O. Terry, you can unmute and begin.

210

00:46:00.630 --> 00:46:06.450

Terry Opgenorth: Okay. Well, thank you for allowing me to present. My name is Terry Opgenorth.

211

00:46:07.680 --> 00:46:19.560

Terry Opgenorth: Spelling of that name is O-P-G-E-N-O-R-T-H. I'm a landowner in the impact zone near the Colorado-Wyoming border, just to the south of that state line.

212

00:46:20.340 --> 00:46:30.270

Terry Opgenorth: I have two points I'd like to address that I do not believe were adequately addressed in the technical reports prepared by WAPA,

213

00:46:31.050 --> 00:46:55.050

Terry Opgenorth: by ConnectGen LLC, or the EIS, and then offer a compromise solution that I think may address both of those issues. So the first, related to the biological resources report sections 4.7.2.7 and 5.4.2.3 related to big game. And I won't

214

00:46:56.160 --> 00:47:04.350

Terry Opgenorth: read all of what I submitted to you in writing, but I do want to quote a couple of things from section 4.7.2.7

215

00:47:05.070 --> 00:47:19.890

Terry Opgenorth: which says, “based on feedback provided by WGFD, which is the Wyoming Game Fish Department, during initial agency outright outreach, the Project Area is located outside proposed ungulate migration corridors.

216

00:47:20.790 --> 00:47:35.880

Terry Opgenorth: And then in 5.4.2.3, also referencing big game migration routes, it says, again, the same thing that that you know that there are not migration corridors in play.

217

00:47:38.700 --> 00:47:48.540

Terry Opgenorth: This is factually incorrect and I provided photographs of elk herds in the area on three different occasions dating back to 2015, 2018,

218

00:47:50.400 --> 00:48:00.480

Terry Opgenorth: and then, most recently April 5 of this past year. And this is a substantial herd which I’ve seen many times over the years as I traveled Cherokee Park Road

219

00:48:01.260 --> 00:48:14.310

Terry Opgenorth: in numbers from anywhere from 30 to 50 to 200 to 300 at a time. And it travels from West of Cherokee Park Road to east of 287 and in fact I've seen dead animals,

220

00:48:14.670 --> 00:48:32.100

Terry Opgenorth: the result of vehicle collisions on 287, so they clearly migrate across that corridor, and based on the dates of my photographs, which are in the winter months and early spring, the elk are using this as their winter range and as their birthing ground,

221

00:48:33.480 --> 00:48:43.590

Terry Opgenorth: two critical times for that elk herd population. And, as I point out in my written notes, I’ve only seen the elk herd south of the transmission line.

222

00:48:44.430 --> 00:48:54.300

Terry Opgenorth: And so I’ll come back to that in just a moment. The other point I’d like to raise is that Diamond Peak is nowhere mentioned in the visual impact, and for residents of the Boulder Ridge area,

223

00:48:54.810 --> 00:49:04.980

Terry Opgenorth: and for anybody driving on Cherokee Park Road, Diamond Peak is what you see going south. And the wind farm, while it would be to the east

224

00:49:05.430 --> 00:49:20.130

Terry Opgenorth: of Cherokee Park Road, would definitely be within the visual aspect of blocking Diamond Peak. So what I'm suggesting is to reduce the size of the wind farm in its southern section below the transmission line corridor.

225

00:49:22.980 --> 00:49:24.000

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

226

00:49:25.170 --> 00:49:26.940

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next up is Richard D.

227

00:49:28.290 --> 00:49:30.630

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Richard, you may unmute and begin when you're ready.

228

00:49:32.190 --> 00:49:46.230

Richard Dow: My name is Richard Dow. That is spelled R-I-C-H-A-R-D D-O-W. I'm a resident of Albany County. I live approximately 4 or 5 miles north of the proposed Project.

229

00:49:46.980 --> 00:50:00.450

Richard Dow: And I have previously submitted written comments via email, so I won't repeat all of those now, but I urge WAPA to choose the no-connection alternative. That's the end of my comments. Thank you.

230

00:50:03.720 --> 00:50:04.710

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

231

00:50:06.090 --> 00:50:13.140

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just a reminder, you may use the Q&A button to write out questions for the panel and we will continue to

232

00:50:13.800 --> 00:50:32.850

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): take speakers as you go ahead and re-queue. You may also speak again if you wish. Just, again, raise your hand or use the star-nine function for those on the phone to re-enter the queue. Next up it looks like we have Emma C. Emma, you may unmute and begin when you're ready.

233

00:50:34.620 --> 00:50:37.080

Emma Clute: Thank you. Do I need to spell my name again?

234

00:50:39.720 --> 00:50:41.040

Emma Clute: I can, and I'm

235

00:50:41.670 --> 00:50:42.180

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): That'd be great.

236

00:50:42.570 --> 00:50:55.830

Emma Clute: Okay, C-L-U-T-E. I just wanted to second Mr. Opgenorth's observation about the elk herds and, and note that

237

00:50:56.940 --> 00:51:02.100

Emma Clute: I've seen the herds northeast of the transmission line corridor.

238

00:51:03.180 --> 00:51:06.180

Emma Clute: And he noted that they were, I believe, southwest.

239

00:51:07.500 --> 00:51:09.480

Emma Clute: So it's a

240

00:51:10.560 --> 00:51:19.290

Emma Clute: large area that they are traveling in. And I really appreciated Ms. Davis' comments about the danger of wild flower—fire.

241

00:51:20.790 --> 00:51:31.200

Emma Clute: It's a very, very real concern for us, and I would also like to note that we have also been able—unable to secure fire insurance.

242

00:51:32.850 --> 00:51:39.240

Emma Clute: So it's a very real problem for all of the families that are living in the surrounding area of this Project.

243

00:51:41.430 --> 00:51:41.880

Emma Clute: Thank you.

244

00:51:45.270 --> 00:51:57.150

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment. Next step is phone number ending in 8023, and after that we'll have a comment from Paul M.

245

00:52:00.090 --> 00:52:05.640

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): For the phone number ending in, excuse me, or, excuse me, 0823.

246

00:52:06.390 --> 00:52:08.040

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): You can unmute and begin when you're ready.

247

00:52:10.200 --> 00:52:12.750

Donna Lange: Hi my name is Donna Lange, can you hear me?

248

00:52:14.820 --> 00:52:15.450

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Yes, we can.

249

00:52:16.290 --> 00:52:18.810

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Please, please go ahead and spell your name for us, too. Thank you.

250

00:52:20.340 --> 00:52:21.420

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): D-O-.

251

00:52:21.570 --> 00:52:26.310

Donna Lange: N-N-A L-A-N-G-E.

252

00:52:27.720 --> 00:52:38.700

Donna Lange: I am speaking to you today to express my concerns about the Rail Tie Wind Project. This draft environmental study has pointed out there will be drastic impacts to the Project area and beyond.

253

00:52:39.420 --> 00:52:51.690

Donna Lange: I'm specifically concerned about water. Water is life. Any possibility of contamination to water, whether by unregulated blasting, concrete forms, or leaking of unregulated nacelle oils

254

00:52:52.110 --> 00:52:58.170

Donna Lange: is not only an environmental nightmare, it's a disaster to the families living adjacent to this proposed Project.

255

00:52:59.340 --> 00:53:04.440

Donna Lange: I am also specifically concerned about the increased fire danger this Project will bring to the area.

256

00:53:05.640 --> 00:53:15.600

Donna Lange: Nacelle fires are not the only issue, but the documentation of wind towers being lightning attraction to an area for many miles surrounding each tower is frightening.

257

00:53:16.380 --> 00:53:24.120

Donna Lange: The proposed Project Area's southwest boundary is adjacent to forested area with the Roosevelt National Forest being just a few miles further.

258

00:53:24.900 --> 00:53:30.510

Donna Lange: With such increase danger, fire suppression systems on each tower should be required.

259

00:53:31.080 --> 00:53:37.500

Donna Lange: With an increased lightning strike potential that goes far beyond the Project boundaries to adjacent subdivisions and homes,

260

00:53:38.160 --> 00:53:50.310

Donna Lange: this makes an environmental risk very great. In order for this Project to be a good neighbor, and fit into this community, and show concern for our immediate environment, they must do more proactive fire mitigation

261

00:53:50.760 --> 00:54:01.740

Donna Lange: than rely on a volunteer fire department and provide 500 gallons of water. Relying on these firefighting measures is unreasonable for an industrial complex of this size.

262

00:54:02.730 --> 00:54:15.270

Donna Lange: I'm also very dismayed that this Project will not be a good neighbor and fit into the current community and landscape, but it will become the dominant and prominent feature of well over 400,000 acres.

263

00:54:15.870 --> 00:54:26.430

Donna Lange: This definitely impacts the local environment and obliterates the character and identity of Ames Monument, a national treasure, and the communities of Tie Siding, Pumpkin Vine, Vedauwoo,

264

00:54:27.090 --> 00:54:39.990

Donna Lange: and all of south Albany County. Because of the disastrous possibilities. I'm very concerned and I ask that you find the environmental impact too significant to allow this Project to go forward.

265

00:54:41.040 --> 00:54:51.660

Donna Lange: Concern for the environment begins at home and close to home. I appreciate your study of this specific area and taking my comments into consideration. Thank you.

266

00:54:54.960 --> 00:54:59.190

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment. The next speaker is Paul Montoya.

267

00:55:00.210 --> 00:55:05.640

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): After that, we will hear from Bill Dorcey. Paul, you may unmute and speak when you're ready.

268

00:55:07.230 --> 00:55:14.490

Paul Montoya: Thank you, Sarah, this is a Paul Montoya. My name is spelled M-O-N-T-O-Y-A. Paul.

269

00:55:15.540 --> 00:55:19.080

Paul Montoya: Sarah, I had, I represent the Albany County for

270

00:55:22.020 --> 00:55:23.670

Paul Montoya: Smart Energy Development.

271

00:55:24.900 --> 00:55:29.820

Paul Montoya: My question, Sarah, is how can the public get a copy of the video from today's meeting?

272

00:55:37.320 --> 00:55:44.220

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thanks for your question. We'll go ahead and we're going to make a note of that and will answer all questions when all speakers have had an opportunity to speak.

273

00:55:44.520 --> 00:55:48.540

Paul Montoya: Okay. My next question is going to be for Mark Wieringa.

274

00:55:49.650 --> 00:56:02.880

Paul Montoya: Mark, thank you for your communication you've had with our group in regard to doing a public meeting. My question is: Has WAPA ever issued a no-connection determination? If so, what was the last time they issued one?

275

00:56:05.190 --> 00:56:09.510

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Mr. Montoya, again, we will hold all questions until the end, after all speakers have had

276

00:56:09.510 --> 00:56:12.900

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): an opportunity to speak. So if you want to just keep going with your questions you're welcome to.

277

00:56:13.290 --> 00:56:24.330

Paul Montoya: I'll keep going with my questions here, I've got more questions. That's why I was kind of hoping we'd have public dialogue in person, rather than through Zoom because Zoom is very controllable this way by you all.

278

00:56:25.290 --> 00:56:37.980

Paul Montoya: My other question for the panel would be: Has a WAPA ever issued a no-connection determination based on a visual impact assessment? If so, when was that and at what Project?

279

00:56:39.660 --> 00:56:54.300

Paul Montoya: My next question would be: How was Tetra selected as a consulting company for this Project? Do they work with WAPA on an ongoing basis, or is this a bid-type process? How are they selected?

280

00:56:56.490 --> 00:57:02.100

Paul Montoya: I also have a question: Does ConnectGen have any determinative input in the EIS decision?

281

00:57:05.610 --> 00:57:07.830

Paul Montoya: And finally,

282

00:57:10.110 --> 00:57:21.150

Paul Montoya: I didn't it—the timetable that was outlined in your presentation didn't really highlight when the determination would be made. I don't know if that's going to be after the

283

00:57:22.740 --> 00:57:42.300

Paul Montoya: EIS becomes a non-draft EIS and then there's the determination at that point, or the determination for a no-connect or connect comes later than that. But I'd like clarification of that too. Those are all my questions. I'll have further comments at tomorrow's session. Thank you.

284

00:57:44.580 --> 00:57:46.380

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comments and questions.

285

00:57:47.460 --> 00:57:54.870

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): As a reminder to all attendees: you're also welcome to use the Q&A button at the bottom of your screen to type out your questions.

286

00:57:56.100 --> 00:58:00.630

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next up, we'll have Bill Dorcey. Bill, you may unmute and speak when you're ready.

287

00:58:15.960 --> 00:58:16.620

Bill Dorcey: Can you hear me?

288

00:58:17.220 --> 00:58:18.120

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Yes, we can.

289

00:58:19.110 --> 00:58:21.840

Bill Dorcey: Okay, I have some questions and comments here. Kind of a mix.

290

00:58:24.540 --> 00:58:31.350

Bill Dorcey: I wonder how many people around this meeting, have visited the proposed area? I guess I'll submit that

291

00:58:33.180 --> 00:58:33.450

Bill Dorcey: in writing.

292

00:58:35.880 --> 00:58:37.050

Bill Dorcey: Why not erect the wind farm

293

00:58:38.670 --> 00:58:42.630

Bill Dorcey: near Cheyenne that's been abandoned by Excel Energy instead of create a whole new landscape?

294

00:58:48.810 --> 00:58:51.240

Bill Dorcey: Then there's wind farms in Oklahoma and California

295

00:58:52.800 --> 00:59:02.760

Bill Dorcey: that are being abandoned, instead of being rehabbed. I don't see what the benefit is of contaminating more

296

00:59:04.080 --> 00:59:13.920

Bill Dorcey: rural areas with these wind farms that will have to be demolished in around 20 to 30 years.

297

00:59:15.150 --> 00:59:28.350

Bill Dorcey: And for me there's no benefit for this Project. It's not gonna reduce my electrical bill. And I would like to get a list of donation spent by ConGen

298

00:59:28.890 --> 00:59:40.170

Bill Dorcey: to the city of Laramie Ivansen hospital, Albany County Pilot Hill Project, if any, and an update to the surveys and studies. Seems like some of these studies

299

00:59:41.490 --> 00:59:46.140

Bill Dorcey: go back 2009, and I think there needs to be

300

00:59:47.610 --> 00:59:49.710

Bill Dorcey: newer studies, because

301

00:59:51.060 --> 00:59:59.790

Bill Dorcey: the elk herds have kind of come back into this area—been pushed back into this area due to recent fires

302

01:00:00.870 --> 01:00:11.790

Bill Dorcey: in the Medicine Bow Mountains, and so they might stay around this area, but if we're gonna put up wind farms, that's going to chase the wildlife off.

303

01:00:12.750 --> 01:00:34.620

Bill Dorsey: And already the wind farm that's been put in between Buford and Cheyenne has displaced the antelope in that part of the country, because they the windmill blades turning has pushed the antelope out of what was their normal habitat. Has pushed them to

304

01:00:35.880 --> 01:00:44.070

Bill Dorsey: other areas and Albany and Western Laramie County. And I'd like to get an accurate placement of the wind farms.

305

01:00:45.540 --> 01:00:50.760

Bill Dorsey: My first name is Bill, last name Dorsey. D-O-R-C-E-Y.

306

01:00:54.330 --> 01:00:54.900

Bill Dorsey: That's it.

307

01:00:55.980 --> 01:00:56.940

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

308

01:01:01.260 --> 01:01:19.830

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder, will have the queue open until approximately 3:30. You may use the Raise-Hand button to join the queue and be called on to give your public comment. And it looks like our next speaker will be Ruth Summers. Ruth, you may unmute and speak when ready.

309

01:01:21.900 --> 01:01:27.210

Ruth Sommers: Thank you, Sarah and thanks to all of you at WAPA today for the opportunity to comment here.

310

01:01:28.380 --> 01:01:33.180

Ruth Sommers: My first concern is some with some of the wildlife assumptions that have been made.

311

01:01:34.290 --> 01:01:41.310

Ruth Sommers: 85% of the Project has been declared a Wyoming Game and Fish crucial habitat priority area,

312

01:01:41.790 → 01:01:51.990

Ruth Sommers: which is to be protected and management—managed, with the goal of maintaining wildlife populations, particularly moose and big game. There is the moose

313

01:01:52.800 --> 01:01:56.970

Ruth Sommers: crucial winter, the deer crucial winter range in the southeast corner.

314

01:01:57.300 --> 01:02:09.000

Ruth Sommers: And the whole area has been described as an intact ecological region by The Nature Conservancy, which discourages any kind of wind production here, in contrast, with what the Sierra Club may feel.

315

01:02:09.840 --> 01:02:22.830

Ruth Sommers: There are two national wildlife refuges nearby—one within 8 miles, plus the Laramie Plains wetland complex to the east, which are unique to this high, semi-arid desert

316

01:02:23.520 --> 01:02:32.940

Ruth Sommers: that provide resting and nesting and breeding sites for migratory birds. But there have been no studies which analyze the migratory patterns of these birds.

317

01:02:33.240 --> 01:02:37.710

Ruth Sommers: They need to be completed before decision-makers can weigh the potential effect of them,

318

01:02:38.280 --> 01:02:47.220

Ruth Sommers: of these turbines on those migrating birds. It is troublesome that some of the wildlife assumptions and finding of no impact are based on studies

319

01:02:47.520 --> 01:03:00.720

Ruth Sommers: that are done in Oklahoma and Oregon. And it's very troublesome that one of those studies deciding the behavior of big game was really an avian and bat study, not a game study.

320

01:03:01.230 --> 01:03:12.060

Ruth Sommers: Wyoming has done in studies on pronghorn avoidance—the Dunlap Wind Farm in northern Converse County—but none of those studies were cited.

321

01:03:12.780 --> 01:03:17.880

Ruth Sommers: There's extensive sightings of bald and golden eagles, as well as raptors in the wildlife area

322

01:03:18.390 --> 01:03:26.400

Ruth Sommers: undertaken for the EIS, but ConnectGen is not proposing to use some of the most-effective methods of deterrence for bird mortality.

323

01:03:26.760 --> 01:03:45.360

Ruth Sommers: We could use an EPM that uses the latest technology available in the program similar to Identiflight, demonstrated in Congress County in Wyoming, which decreased eagle mortality by 82%. And I'll address my last concern with another raised hand later. Thank you.

324

01:03:48.780 --> 01:03:49.800

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

325

01:03:55.980 --> 01:04:07.260

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder, the queue will remain open until about 3:30. You may use the Raise-Hand function, or if you are joining by phone, star-nine, to join the queue.

326

01:04:09.210 --> 01:04:13.620

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): You may type out questions to the panel by clicking on the Q&A button

327

01:04:14.790 --> 01:04:15.960

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): at the bottom of your screen.

328

01:04:20.790 --> 01:04:26.430

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And it looks like our next speaker is Ruth Sommers. Ruth, you may unmute and begin when you're ready.

329

01:04:28.440 --> 01:04:38.640

Ruth Sommers Thank you again, Sarah. My name is Ruth, R-U-T-H, Sommers, S-O-M-M-E-R-S, and I am a resident of Albany County, forgot to say that.

330

01:04:41.850 --> 01:04:53.250

Ruth Sommers: I would like to reiterate some of the instances on studies that were relied on those that were taken only on the west side of the Project about 10 years ago for Hermosa.

331

01:04:53.940 --> 01:05:04.590

Ruth Sommers: That area, for instance, was found to be suitable for turbine bases, but those turbine bases, at that time, were only 7 to 8 feet deep. They're at least twice that depth now.

332

01:05:04.980 --> 01:05:17.970

Ruth Sommers: The east and west sides of the Project are not at all the same. The northwest portion is mapped, showing a bedrock of shale and limestone, and the entire east is mapped as having only a Sherman granite bedrock.

333

01:05:18.450 --> 01:05:27.540

Ruth Sommers: Most concerning to those of us living around the Project, the entire East side has a much shallower depth-to-groundwater—0 to 10 feet.

334

01:05:27.870 --> 01:05:34.590

Ruth Sommers: Much more shallow than the west side. There's not enough information on the east side to make sound decisions on turbine placement,

335

01:05:34.890 --> 01:05:42.690

Ruth Sommers: the potential need for blasting, or whether de-watering will be needed. What happens to our shallow aquifers when things are de-watered?

336

01:05:42.990 --> 01:05:56.610

Ruth Sommers: Does that water come back immediately, or does it take it a full year to recharge? What environmental protection measures are in place, should the groundwater wells or underground structures be negatively affected by turbine placement?

337

01:05:57.780 --> 01:06:11.190

Ruth Sommers: These are some of the things that we need to have discussion that just needs to take us tell us what environmental protection measures can be in place for our water. And our Counties need to protect us from the same dangers. Thank you very much.

338

01:06:15.300 --> 01:06:16.350

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

339

01:06:23.040 --> 01:06:27.180

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder, you may sign up to speak using the Raise-Hand function

340

01:06:29.040 --> 01:07:13.980

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): and the queue will be open until 3:30.

341

01:07:19.440 --> 01:07:25.320

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Looks like our next speaker is Susan Davis. Susan, you may unmute and begin speaking when you're ready.

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01:07:27.540 --> 01:07:32.610

John Davis: Actually, it's John Davis, not Susan. J-O-H-N

343

01:07:33.690 --> 01:07:51.720

John Davis: D-A-V-I-S, and we have property at 244 Elk Crossing Road in Tie Siding, Wyoming. And this proposed Project is directly in our view-scape, and so we oppose it.

344

01:07:52.770 --> 01:07:57.360

John Davis: But there's reasons to oppose it other than view-scape and

345

01:07:58.530 --> 01:08:04.170

John Davis: I haven't heard much from historians in this webcast, but

346

01:08:05.310 --> 01:08:09.150

John Davis: if you drive a little bit farther south on 287

347

01:08:10.350 --> 01:08:13.260

John Davis: you get to Virginia Dale.

348

01:08:14.400 --> 01:08:19.800

John Davis: And Virginia Dale is the last stagecoach station before you get to Wyoming.

349

01:08:20.880 --> 01:08:26.910

John Davis: And the Wyoming stagecoach station was at Willow Creek, which is directly behind

350

01:08:28.230 --> 01:08:30.060

John Davis: Tie Siding and

351

01:08:31.590 --> 01:08:32.130

John Davis: the

352

01:08:34.170 --> 01:08:35.220

John Davis: that trail,

353

01:08:36.270 --> 01:08:39.720

John Davis: the Overland Trail, named for the,

354

01:08:40.740 --> 01:08:43.500

John Davis: the Ben Holiday Overland Stage Company,

355

01:08:44.760 --> 01:08:56.910

John Davis: was really retracing the path of the Cherokee Trail, and that's why the road that leads to our ranch, Cherokee Park Road—

356

01:08:57.480 --> 01:09:17.790

John Davis: and there was no Cherokee out in that part of the country, it was named because the Cherokee Tribe went west to mine gold or the rest of the miners in the '49—you've heard of the '49ers?—well, that was when

357

01:09:19.020 --> 01:09:25.470

John Davis: the Cherokee went west and made a trail there that later became the Overland Trail.

358

01:09:26.490 --> 01:09:31.230

John Davis: So, there's a lot of history here. You know about the

359

01:09:32.460 --> 01:09:44.100

John Davis: Ames Monument. You probably know about Tie Siding and the Dale Creek trestle site, which is pictured in a lot of restaurants and

360

01:09:44.700 --> 01:09:52.680

John Davis: tourist attractions. But, you know, this is not the right place for a 26,000-acre wind farm.

361

01:09:53.670 --> 01:10:13.230

John Davis: You know, they're only coming here because they can export the energy through the WAPA power lines and the WAPA power lines go on into Colorado and so should this Project. So, unless you have any questions for me, that concludes my comments.

362

01:10:19.050 --> 01:10:20.310

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comments.

363

01:10:28.260 --> 01:10:33.960

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Our next speaker is Paul Montoya. Paul, when you're ready, you can unmute and begin.

364

01:10:34.650 --> 01:10:47.880

Paul Montoya: Yeah, Paul Montoya representing Albany County for Smart Energy Development. My question would be: why can't panelists answer some of the questions we've submitted while we're waiting for other people to speak? That's all I have. Thank you.

365

01:10:53.700 --> 01:10:54.810

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

366

01:11:01.080 --> 01:11:10.140

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Also, just want to remind everyone that there are many ways to comment on the draft EIS.

367

01:11:13.110 --> 01:11:15.870

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Give us a moment will post those on the screen for you.

368

01:11:25.650 --> 01:11:36.300

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The email address, web address for the online forum, and mailing address are displayed on the screen. This information is also available on the Project website.

369

01:11:37.500 --> 01:11:42.990

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Written comments submitted electronically via the online form or email are preferred.

370

01:11:45.660 --> 01:11:54.780

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Comments offered during this hearing will be considered, along with comments that are provided in writing as the draft EIS is revised.

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01:11:58.350 --> 01:12:08.400

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): WAPA would like you to know that written comments are preferred, and you are encouraged to send your comments via email or use the online form provided in the Project website.

372

01:12:09.480 --> 01:12:23.940

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And that, while WAPA can receive comments through the mail, please note that access to WAPA's Headquarters Office is limited because of the COVID-19 pandemic, so written comments mailed to the Headquarters Office may be delayed and reaching the Project Team.

373

01:12:25.770 --> 01:12:39.750

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): I will also remind you that a recording of this hearing and the hearing transcript will be posted on the Project website following the meeting. In addition, both the questions and responses that are asked today will be posted on the website, following the hearing.

374

01:12:45.030 --> 01:12:48.300

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We will leave up these addresses for a few moments, and then

375

01:12:49.950 --> 01:13:02.460

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): see if we have any other speakers sign up. The panel is working to formulate answers to the questions that have been posed and we'll start sharing those soon, if there are no other speakers who sign up.

376

01:13:45.090 --> 01:13:55.740

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Alright, our next speaker will be Miria White. Miria, you can unmute and speak when you're ready. After that, we'll hear from Emma Clute.

377

01:13:58.320 --> 01:14:00.720

Miria White: Okay, my name is Miria White.

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01:14:01.770 --> 01:14:09.300

Miria White: My first name is spelled M-I-R-I-A, my last name is W-H-I-T-E.

379

01:14:10.920 --> 01:14:21.270

Miria White: So, I would like to speak to you that there are proper places to put wind turbines in even in the County, in Albany County.

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01:14:22.380 --> 01:14:27.570

Miria White: And there are improper places. This is very clearly an improper place.

381

01:14:28.740 --> 01:14:41.490

Miria White: At the proposed site, I did a research project, where I looked at how many rural residential parcels were located within a 5-mile radius of the Project

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01:14:41.910 --> 01:14:52.320

Miria White: boundaries and I compared that to other wind projects in both Carbon and Albany County. So projects like Boswell Springs and

383

01:14:53.070 --> 01:15:08.130

Miria White: Two Rivers/Lucky Star are properly placed because they have less than nine residential parcels within a 5-mile radius of those projects. But Rail Tie, at its proposed location,

384

01:15:08.370 --> 01:15:25.260

Miria White: has 183 on the Wyoming side and possibly 150 or more on the Colorado side within a 5-mile radius. So it's been clearly demonstrated by even the wind industry themselves that

385

01:15:25.650 --> 01:15:44.400

Miria White: people and residents don't mix with wind turbines. There's plenty of locations all across Wyoming, all across the western United States that are much, much more appropriate than this particular location, just because it conflicts with so many residents.

386

01:15:45.870 --> 01:15:57.450

Miria White: And a way an illustration of how it's going to affect all of those, those residents, including myself, is the acoustical assessment, the technical report.

387

01:15:58.380 --> 01:16:10.830

Miria White: Now I was extremely upset that the, that Amanda McDonald just casually mentioned during the County Commissioners' meeting that the wrong report was placed into the draft EIS.

388

01:16:11.730 --> 01:16:21.300

Miria White: Now that, how are public, how is the public supposed to comment on the draft EIS when you don't even have the correct report?

389

01:16:21.780 --> 01:16:35.370

Miria White: All right, that is absolutely ridiculous. Somebody should be losing their job over that. And the fact that the documents on the draft EIS website have been updated periodically.

390

01:16:35.730 --> 01:16:47.460

Miria White: One of them was updated as of April 9, so if Amanda McDonald was aware that this was the wrong report, then why hasn't it been corrected during our public hearing period?

391

01:16:47.910 --> 01:16:58.530

Miria White: If anything, I think that this public hearing period should reset when we have all of the accurate and correct information on the draft EIS.

392

01:16:59.550 --> 01:17:10.410

Miria White: How am I supposed to have an expert look at it, when there's a contrary report, a completely different acoustical report, given to Albany County.

393

01:17:10.830 --> 01:17:18.900

Miria White: And apparently, according to a Amanda McDonald, that happens to be the correct one, so I really want you guys to consider that.

394

01:17:19.650 --> 01:17:24.870

Miria White: And also, are you concerned, is WAPA concerned about

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01:17:25.680 --> 01:17:36.810

Miria White: the Rail Tie Project being able to meet county regulations? Because it certainly doesn't seem like it with the acoustical assessment report, since they're going to break

396

01:17:37.050 --> 01:17:44.910

Miria White: the county regulations with their own report. They prove it in their own report that apparently is the wrong one. Thank you.

397

01:17:45.330 --> 01:17:46.440

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

398

01:17:47.520 --> 01:17:48.720

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next up, we have Emma Clute.

399

01:17:50.550 --> 01:17:52.950

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Emma, you may unmute and begin speaking when you're ready.

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01:17:57.480 --> 01:18:13.980

Emma Clute: Thank you. My name is Emma Clute. It's spelled E-M-M-A C-L-U-T-E. I'm looking at the EIS statement and the environmental protection measures that are listed towards the end.

401

01:18:14.490 --> 01:18:39.030

Emma Clute: And I'm kind of surprised given, you know, the assertion that ConnectGen is, you know, very concerned about preserving the integrity of our environment and our wildlife, there doesn't seem to be any provision for painting one of the turbine blades on each turbine in order to

402

01:18:40.170 --> 01:18:50.880

Emma Clute: prevent or try to discourage birds from flying into it. And I know that that has been done at other turbine sites, other installations

403

01:18:51.210 --> 01:19:04.590

Emma Clute: and seems to be enough, at least a somewhat effective measure. It seems quite simple so I'm a little surprised that that is not mentioned as a possible option. And I also,

404

01:19:06.690 --> 01:19:22.200

Emma Clute: as other speakers have noted, this area is marked as a crucial wildlife area and one of the types of wildlife that is known to have habitats in the planned area are eagles.

405

01:19:23.400 --> 01:19:31.890

Emma Clute: Bald eagles and golden eagles nest in this area. They hunt in this area. I've personally seen many daily.

406

01:19:33.090 --> 01:19:34.770

Emma Clute: And so it seems like

407

01:19:36.180 --> 01:19:46.440

Emma Clute: if ConnectGen were actually concerned, and or genuine in their concerns I suppose, that's such an obvious thing to do. And I

408

01:19:48.150 --> 01:20:07.050

Emma Clute: think it's a little bit representative of the entire handling of this Project, as Ms. White has observed, that there seems to be a disconnect between the expressed intentions and the actual plan, planning, so

409

01:20:08.100 --> 01:20:08.580

Emma Clute: thank you.

410

01:20:12.420 --> 01:20:13.440

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

411

01:20:19.800 --> 01:20:22.650

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Looks like our next speaker is Alan M.

412

01:20:23.700 --> 01:20:25.770

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Alan, you may unmute and speak when you're ready.

413

01:20:30.810 --> 01:20:41.430

Alan Minier: Thank you for giving me an opportunity to talk. I own a house in the vicinity of the Project, and I use Pumpkin Vine Road and Cherokee Park Road to reach it, so two of the local roads.

414

01:20:42.900 --> 01:20:52.830

Alan Minier: I urge you to consider the No Action Alternative seriously at this point. I will be submitting extensive written comments, but I want to give you an example of the kind of thing that concerns me.

415

01:20:53.850 --> 01:21:09.030

Alan Minier: The EIS recognizes the problem of turbine ice throw. It also recognizes that the County provides for a general, not a specific, but general setback from county roads of 1.1 times tower height.

416

01:21:10.260 --> 01:21:12.390

Alan Minier: But if I read into the health and safety report,

417

01:21:13.620 --> 01:21:22.800

Alan Minier: on pages seven and 11 both, it goes on to say that ice throw is not anticipated at more than approximately 1.5 times the turbine blade tip height.

418

01:21:23.820 --> 01:21:36.900

Alan Minier: So, on its face, the EIS says that the ice throw danger exceeds the County setback. So I don't see how you can say the risk is mitigated at all. In fact, I think a greater setback is required.

419

01:21:37.950 --> 01:21:46.350

Alan Minier: I think the right number is the one that's used in the adjoining county, Laramie County, which is 1.5 times the cell height plus rotor diameter.

420

01:21:47.790 --> 01:21:51.540

Alan Minier: And I think that's more reasonable standard. So, overall,

421

01:21:52.860 --> 01:22:04.830

Alan Minier: I question the premise that is underlying a lot of the environmental protection measures here, which is that you can rely on the County or County particular or other agencies to be ensuring that

422

01:22:05.550 --> 01:22:19.830

Alan Minier: the mitigation measures that are represented here are either going to be taken out by—undertaken by ConnectGen, or will be effective when they are. Thank you for listening to me and I will be, as I said, providing written comments.

423

01:22:22.920 --> 01:22:24.000

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

424

01:22:29.820 --> 01:22:35.250

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder, the queue is still open, you may use the Raise-Hand function

425

01:22:37.260 --> 01:22:41.250

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): to sign up to speak, or if you're joining us by phone, star-nine.

426

01:23:24.750 --> 01:23:37.470

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Alright, since it seems that we have a pause in our speaker queue, I'm going to go ahead and start answering some of the questions that have been posed to the panel during the public hearing so far.

427

01:23:39.240 --> 01:23:52.290

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): I'm going to start with a question that was asked regarding where to obtain a recording of today's meeting or the video that was played during the presentation.

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01:23:53.820 --> 01:24:05.250

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): So, both the recording of today's meeting and the video that was provided during today's meeting, those will both be available on the

429

01:24:05.940 --> 01:24:21.180

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): public involvement website for the Project and on WAPA's Project website. I'm going to post links to both of those websites in the chat, which is something that panel, both attendees and panelists, can view.

430

01:24:45.600 --> 01:24:56.640

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next, I'm going to answer or next will address the question: Has WAPA ever considered a no-connection determination, if so, when was the last time?

431

01:24:59.280 --> 01:25:13.350

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel response to that question is: WAPA has not, to our knowledge, denied an interconnection request at the environmental stage. Several have been denied at the feasibility stage or system impact study stage.

432

01:25:14.850 --> 01:25:20.670

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): This was because there was not sufficient capacity available, or the cost of system improvement was too high.

433

01:25:21.780 --> 01:25:27.690

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Only the interconnections that pass these hurdles went on to be analyzed in a NEPA process.

434

01:25:28.950 --> 01:25:48.240

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): WAPA's decision to approve or deny an interconnection request is limited by FERC Orders, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Orders, regarding open access to transmission; generally, WAPA must have a very compelling power system reason not to approve a request.

435

01:25:52.770 --> 01:26:09.090

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question is: Has WAPA ever received—excuse me, I'll start over. Has WAPA ever issued a no-connection determination based on a visual impact of determination? If so, when was the last time, and what was the Project?

436

01:26:11.370 --> 01:26:18.030

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: No. WAPA has not denied an interconnection due to visual impacts.

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01:26:23.970 --> 01:26:24.960

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question:

438

01:26:26.280 --> 01:26:30.600

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): How was Tetra Tech chosen as a consultant? Was there a bid process?

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01:26:32.280 --> 01:26:33.450

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

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01:26:34.770 --> 01:26:43.440

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Tetra Tech was selected as ConnectGen's environmental consultant through a competitive request for proposal process performed by ConnectGen.

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01:26:44.130 --> 01:26:57.690

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Similarly, SWCA Environmental Consultants was selected as WAPA's third-party National Environmental Policy Act contractor by WAPA through a competitive request for proposal process.

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01:26:59.040 --> 01:27:01.200

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): These were entirely separate procurements.

443

01:27:07.860 --> 01:27:08.910

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question:

444

01:27:10.170 --> 01:27:15.390

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Does ConnectGen have a determinative input in the EIS decision?

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01:27:16.740 --> 01:27:17.910

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

446

01:27:19.290 --> 01:27:25.800

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): ConnectGen does not have any input to or influence over WAPA's interconnection decision.

447

01:27:29.100 --> 01:27:30.120

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question:

448

01:27:31.830 --> 01:27:34.380

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): When will the interconnection determination be made?

449

01:27:37.560 --> 01:27:38.850

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel's response:

450

01:27:39.930 --> 01:27:55.980

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The interconnection request decision will be made by WAPA after the final EIS has been released to the public and the availability period has occurred. This is currently expected in early 2022.

451

01:28:01.920 --> 01:28:02.940

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question:

452

01:28:04.650 --> 01:28:10.560

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Why not resurrect another wind farm, specifically the abandoned farm south of Cheyenne?

453

01:28:14.700 --> 01:28:15.960

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

454

01:28:22.020 --> 01:28:32.070

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): When identifying sites for wind development, ConnectGen considers both greenfield locations, as well as opportunities to depower older wind projects.

455

01:28:32.700 --> 01:28:43.200

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The Rail Tie Wind Project location was selected because of a number of factors, including wind resources, availability of transmission, and environmental factors.

456

01:28:49.050 --> 01:28:50.040

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question:

457

01:28:52.290 --> 01:28:57.090

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Please provide a list of donations ConnectGen has made to entities in Albany County.

458

01:29:00.090 --> 01:29:01.890

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the response from the panel:

459

01:29:03.210 --> 01:29:13.020

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): In an effort to be a good community member, ConnectGen has donated to local charities and organizations such as United Way and the Pilot Hill Project.

460

01:29:14.100 --> 01:29:31.350

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): As part of the long-term engagement in Albany County, ConnectGen anticipates future opportunities to sponsor local community events and charitable organizations. ConnectGen has not made donations to any Albany County or City of Laramie agencies or elected officials.

461

01:29:45.210 --> 01:29:54.030

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the next question: Can WAPA certify that all written comments submitted for the public hearing will in fact be read by decision makers?

462

01:30:04.770 --> 01:30:08.580

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We know comments have been received, but that does not mean they have been read.

463

01:30:20.100 --> 01:30:21.840

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the response from the panel:

464

01:30:23.550 --> 01:30:38.520

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Comments will be read and used to revise the draft EIS. Decision-makers will read the draft final EIS before approval, but not the raw comments. They may ask for a briefing on the Project, as well.

465

01:30:53.460 --> 01:30:55.830

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder, the queue is still open.

466

01:30:56.850 --> 01:30:57.450

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): You may use the—

467

01:30:58.470 --> 01:31:05.160

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): sorry, you may use the Raise-Hand button at the bottom of your screen or, for those joining on the phone, you may dial star-nine

468

01:31:06.510 --> 01:31:08.850

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): to sign up to speak during this public hearing.

469

01:31:12.000 --> 01:31:20.340

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): We'll pause for a moment and give folks the opportunity to sign up if they wish to and then we'll resume addressing the comments that have been asked so far.

470

01:32:22.890 --> 01:32:28.650

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, we're going to continue on answering some of the questions that have been asked during the public hearing.

471

01:32:29.850 --> 01:32:39.510

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): So, the next question is: Even if, if even one eagle is killed by a wind turbine, why is that not a violation of Federal law?

472

01:32:42.120 --> 01:32:52.950

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel's response: Bald and golden eagles are protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act (BGEPA) originally passed in 1940.

473

01:32:53.490 --> 01:33:02.610

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): In addition to individuals, both active and inactive nests are also protected with buffer distances to prevent disturbance of nesting-related activities.

474

01:33:03.810 --> 01:33:14.790

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Take of an eagle or its nest is not a violation of Federal law if authorized by a BGEPA permit, which are administered by the United States Fish and Wildlife Service.

475

01:33:20.910 --> 01:33:31.980

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question: If the population of eagles in the Project Area is small, single digits, why is killing one eagle not considered a significant population impact?

476

01:33:34.320 --> 01:33:44.910

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel's response: Bald and golden eagles have different population trajectories, and therefore the impact of the death, from the death, of one eagle differs by species.

477

01:33:45.600 --> 01:33:55.560

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Regardless, WAPA has recommended ConnectGen pursue a BGEPA permit for this Project to cover possible impacts to both eagle species.

478

01:34:04.860 --> 01:34:17.880

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question is kind of a compound question so I'll do my best: How can the public get a video copy of today's meeting? We answered that one earlier and posted the links in the chat.

479

01:34:20.130 --> 01:34:23.460

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Has WAPA ever issued a no-connection determination?

480

01:34:27.060 --> 01:34:28.770

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): I think we answered that one earlier.

481

01:34:29.970 --> 01:34:36.420

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And we also—I think have answered the rest of this particular one regarding

482

01:34:37.620 --> 01:34:48.720

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): a no-connection determination, based on visual impacts, which Project, how Tetra Tech was selected, and ConnectGen's input into the draft EIS decision.

483

01:37:36.570 --> 01:37:39.540

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, I have another question and response that's ready.

484

01:37:50.520 --> 01:37:55.560

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The question is: The EIS identifies strong visual impact to the Ames Monument.

485

01:37:57.720 --> 01:38:01.590/

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): How did the proposed mitigation measures mitigate the strong visual impact?

486

01:38:03.510 --> 01:38:04.950

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel response:

487

01:38:07.980 --> 01:38:17.100

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Measures to mitigate visual impacts to Ames National Historic Landmark will be determined in consultation with the Wyoming State Historic Preservation Officer

488

01:38:17.790 --> 01:38:33.120

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): and the other consulting parties. Ideas raised by consulting parties are presented in the draft programmatic agreement, or PA, and measures agreed upon will be handled through the development of a historic properties treatment plan, as required in the final PA.

489

01:38:52.740 --> 01:38:54.060

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And just a reminder again,

490

01:38:55.140 --> 01:39:08.490

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): the queue will remain open until about 3:30. You can use the Raise-Hand button at the bottom of your screen, or if you're joining us by phone, you may dial star-nine to join the queue.

491

01:39:10.200 --> 01:39:16.200

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): It looks like our next speaker is Susan Davis. Susan, you may unmute and speak when you're ready.

492

01:39:19.350 --> 01:39:27.930

John Davis: Thank you. It's actually John Davis, but Susan and I own property in Tie Siding, Wyoming.

493

01:39:29.100 --> 01:39:43.260

John Davis: And we built it in 2005. It was a log home that's a kind of a kit thing that once it's established, it's what you call a log home.

494

01:39:44.850 --> 01:39:48.180

John Davis: And according to the Albany County Assessor,

495

01:39:49.230 --> 01:39:49.980

John Davis: last year,

496

01:39:51.120 --> 01:39:57.720

John Davis: the value of our property, including the 35 acres that it's on within Fish Creek Ranch.

497

01:39:58.890 --> 01:40:01.560

John Davis: was \$804,000.

498

01:40:03.150 --> 01:40:07.500

John Davis: Yeah, that's a lot of money. It's more than we put into it. But,

499

01:40:08.700 --> 01:40:10.380

John Davis: the last

500

01:40:11.430 --> 01:40:21.870

John Davis: valuation we got from the Albany County Assessor indicates that it's \$157,000 less. And

501

01:40:23.340 --> 01:40:31.290

John Davis: it's solely attributable to the fact that the wind farm proposed here is within our view-scape.

502

01:40:32.730 --> 01:40:38.100

John Davis: So, for them to say that there's no economic consequence here.

503

01:40:39.900 --> 01:40:40.650

John Davis: I've seen it

504

01:40:41.790 --> 01:40:54.120

John Davis: visibly through the Albany County Assessor's Office. They say on the front of the ranch the lots that view where the wind farm will be,

505

01:40:55.920 --> 01:41:03.300

John Davis: you know, are subject to a lower valuation than the ones that are deeper in the ranch that don't look at the wind farm.

506

01:41:04.980 --> 01:41:17.940

John Davis: And it's kind of dismaying to me. I mean, we built in a platted subdivision, you know, you would think that a subdivision within its area

507

01:41:19.500 --> 01:41:32.820

John Davis: ought to control the surrounding areas to be commensurate with it. And this isn't a WAPA concern, it is not a Federal government concern, but it is an Albany County concern.

508

01:41:33.300 --> 01:41:50.130

John Davis: But nobody seems to be concerned, and that's why I bring it up here. So, here I am \$157,000 cheaper than I was a year ago and I asked, you know, whether the

509

01:41:52.170 --> 01:42:00.000

John Davis: the Rail Tie Wind Project is worth that in terms of the entire view-scape. Thank you.

510

01:42:06.420 --> 01:42:07.440

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

511

01:43:44.400 --> 01:43:47.040

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, I'll go ahead and address another question that was asked.

512

01:43:50.010 --> 01:43:52.980

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The question is: How much money—sorry, that's not the one.

513

01:43:59.250 --> 01:44:04.800

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Will WAPA provide a written response—or, I'm sorry, let me start again with that question.

514

01:44:05.160 --> 01:44:16.710

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Will WAPA provide a written response to written comments, so that those of us who have spent the time to submit a comment will know that the comments have been, comments have been read, understood, and given a reasoned consideration?

515

01:44:17.700 --> 01:44:24.360

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: Written responses will be provided to substantive comments in the final EIS.

516

01:44:33.990 --> 01:44:48.780

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question is: On WAPA's website, the organization is described as dealing with hydroelectric. I'm curious why they are now considering being involved with ConnectGen and wind energy resources. The panel's response:

517

01:44:49.980 --> 01:45:07.470

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): WAPA's business is marketing and transmitting hydropower generated by Federal dams in the western U.S.; however, as a transmission system owner and operator, WAPA must consider interconnection requests under open access to transmission regulations, just like any other utility.

518

01:45:54.000 --> 01:46:00.390

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question: How many on the call have visited the proposed Rail Tie Wind Farm Project?

519

01:46:01.620 --> 01:46:09.060

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the response from the panel: The EIS Project Team visited the Project Area during the scoping process.

520

01:46:13.290 --> 01:46:19.290

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Our next comment comes from phone number ending in 0823.

521

01:46:20.310 --> 01:46:23.040

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Commenter, you may unmute and speak when you are ready.

522

01:46:28.050 --> 01:46:30.450

Donna Lange: Hi, my name is Donna Lange. Can you hear me?

523

01:46:32.160 --> 01:46:33.090

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Yes, Donna, go ahead.

524

01:46:35.280 --> 01:46:38.700

Donna Lange: D-O-N-N-A L-A-N-G-E.

525

01:46:39.780 --> 01:46:40.380

Donna Lange: I am

526

01:46:41.610 --> 01:46:52.590

Donna Lange: commenting on the eagle questions that were answered. And I guess, I want to make sure that I understand this correctly, so you may answer this question form later, I guess. But

527

01:46:52.980 --> 01:47:04.170

Donna Lange: do I understand this, if a person or a company gets—and I think you said it was a BGPA permit—it absolves them of the Federal law against killing an eagle?

528

01:47:04.890 --> 01:47:13.350

Donna Lange: And if WAPA is suggesting that ConnectGen get this said permit, can we figure WAPA believes eagles will be killed by this Project?

529

01:47:14.370 --> 01:47:19.500

Donna Lange: If this is true, why then does WAPA not also suggest to ConnectGen

530

01:47:20.790 --> 01:47:35.460

Donna Lange: to force to make a specific bird killing mitigation in this EIS? I heard earlier, another person comments that painting one blade a different color may be an option, yet it wasn't

531

01:47:37.200 --> 01:47:42.300

Donna Lange: in the impact, this environmental impact study, a mitigation option.

532

01:47:45.540 --> 01:47:56.610

Donna Lange: If it is known that eagle killing will occur, it's a known environmental impact, and mitigation for bird kill should be included in the environmental impact study.

533

01:47:57.330 --> 01:48:08.520

Donna Lange: And also, I would like to know if you can please give me the complete name of the permit, and if I had one, the letters and what the complete name of that permit is. Thank you.

534

01:48:16.650 --> 01:48:18.000

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

535

01:48:24.840 --> 01:48:36.960

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The name of the—I'll reiterate, for you, since you are on the phone and it's hard—you can't read the Q&A responses—it's called the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.

536

01:48:38.040 --> 01:48:39.690

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the permit has the same name.

537

01:48:42.000 --> 01:48:45.540

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): So, the acronym is BGEPA.

538

01:49:43.890 --> 01:49:46.140

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, the next question, I think, was provided

539

01:49:47.850 --> 01:49:49.290

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): during a verbal comment.

540

01:49:51.720 --> 01:49:53.010

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the question is:

541

01:49:58.260 --> 01:50:06.960

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Is there, or why isn't there a provision in the mitigation measures in the EIS to paint one of the turbine blades to reduce avian impacts?

542

01:50:08.670 --> 01:50:19.530

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel response is: The commenter appears to be referencing results from a recent study published in 2020 in the *Journal of Ecology and Evolution*.

543

01:50:20.280 --> 01:50:30.180

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Although the study results have shown to be promising, the study was performed at a small scale, and additional research is necessary to replicate results.

544

01:50:31.140 --> 01:50:41.700

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Additionally, the painting of turbine blades may result in other impacts, such as visual, or inconsistencies with county turbine painting requirements.

545

01:50:53.400 --> 01:50:58.530

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question: Why is WAPA using the wrong acoustic report?

546

01:50:59.850 --> 01:51:02.940

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): This was asked as part of a verbal comment.

547

01:51:04.500 --> 01:51:24.150

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel's response: WAPA is using the correct acoustic report for the EIS. The acoustic report developed for the EIS uses the "noisiest" turbine option out of the full range of turbine options under review for the EIS, which is the GE, or General Electric, turbine.

548

01:51:25.320 --> 01:51:30.090

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): This is appropriate, because the EIS considered a range of turbine options.

549

01:51:31.230 --> 01:51:46.080

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Conversely, the Albany County permit application is focused on one specific turbine type, so that acoustic report focuses specifically on the V150-4.2 turbine.

550

01:51:47.160 --> 01:51:55.050

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Both the EIS and the Albany County permit application are using the correct acoustic reports for their respective purposes.

551

01:52:31.260 --> 01:52:39.420

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question was typed out, so I will provide both a written answer and I'll read the question and the answer out loud.

552

01:52:55.410 --> 01:53:06.480

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The question is: How many additional vehicle collisions can be expected due to the increased truck traffic on U.S. 287 during construction and decommissioning?

553

01:53:08.760 --> 01:53:09.870

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

554

01:53:11.550 --> 01:53:16.740

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Section 3.13 of the draft EIS contains information

555

01:53:19.950 --> 01:53:25.110

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): on traffic, excuse me, on transportation and access, including truck traffic.

556

01:53:25.830 --> 01:53:43.980

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The draft EIS concludes that the Project would contribute to changes in traffic volumes on roadways; however, there would be no degradation, to the level of service (or LOS) for roads used for Project activities, including U.S. 287.

557

01:53:46.440 --> 01:53:52.980

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): After reading this section of the draft EIS, you may still have questions or disagree with the information presented there.

558

01:53:53.520 --> 01:54:04.440

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): In that case, please submit specific comments on those points and provide additional information you might have. The Project Team can then assess your input and make appropriate changes to the document.

559

01:55:28.380 --> 01:55:29.610

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question:

560

01:55:31.110 --> 01:55:31.710

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): When will

561

01:55:32.730 --> 01:55:34.710

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): public, in-person meetings be held?

562

01:55:36.390 --> 01:55:37.530

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

563

01:55:38.640 --> 01:55:43.380

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): WAPA takes the health and safety of our employees and the communities we serve very seriously.

564

01:55:44.040 --> 01:55:55.980

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): In the interest of public health and safety, WAPA will not hold an in-person public hearing for the Rail Tie Wind Project draft environmental impact statement. Virtual public hearings are a safe and effective alternative

565

01:55:58.020 --> 01:56:12.480

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): that provide a forum for all stakeholders of the proposed Project to discuss the draft EIS and voice their questions and concerns. Virtual hearings are also accessible to all. There are options to register and join via telephone, as well as the internet.

566

01:57:15.330 --> 01:57:16.410

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question:

567

01:57:21.030 --> 01:57:27.150

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Does these EIS indicate this is a critical wildlife habitat? If so, for what species?

568

01:57:31.740 --> 01:57:40.500

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel's response: There is no designated critical habitat protected pursuant to the Endangered Species Act within the proposed Project's footprint.

569

01:58:56.100 --> 01:58:57.420

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, next question:

570

01:59:01.290 --> 01:59:08.220

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Who is responsible for a drop in property values affected by the wind farm? Many property owners are placing properties up for sale.

571

01:59:10.050 --> 01:59:11.160

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

572

01:59:12.330 --> 01:59:21.900

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Section 3.12 of the draft EIS contains information on social and economic resources, including impacts to property values.

573

01:59:22.410 --> 01:59:29.970

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The draft EIS concludes that the Project would not be expected to materially decrease the property values for nearby homes.

574

01:59:30.540 --> 01:59:42.240

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Relevant studies of the effects of wind facilities on residential property values have shown small increases and decreases that are not statistically significant related to the announcement or presence of wind facilities,

575

01:59:42.750 --> 01:59:47.490

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): and any predicted or observed changes are influenced by other multiple factors.

576

01:59:48.450 --> 01:59:54.060

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): After reading this section of the draft EIS, you may still have questions or disagree with the information presented there.

577

01:59:54.570 --> 02:00:05.250

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): In that case, please submit specific comments on those points and provide any additional information you might have. The Project Team can then assess your input and make appropriate changes to the document.

578

02:00:32.070 --> 02:00:40.920

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question is: Will the Rail Tie Project attain a BGEPA—Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act permit to take eagles?

579

02:00:42.750 --> 02:00:46.140

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): If so, will there be an opportunity for public input on this permit?

580

02:00:47.700 --> 02:00:57.000

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: WAPA has recommended that the Rail Tie Project obtain a BGEPA permit but would not be involved with that process.

581

02:00:57.540 --> 02:01:07.290

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The United States Fish and Wildlife Service administers those permits and uses a national-level process and framework to assess possible eagle take from proposed Projects,

582

02:01:07.710 --> 02:01:12.960

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): as well as what types and levels of mitigation measures would be required to offset any authorized take.

583

02:01:13.860 --> 02:01:30.750

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Any eagle take authorized by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, pursuant to the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, is required to be offset with quantifiable mitigation to benefit eagles. The process for issuing a BGEPA permit is determined by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

584

02:01:59.940 --> 02:02:05.910

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next question: Are wind farms of this magnitude federally taxed like an industry?

585

02:02:07.140 --> 02:02:21.270

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: Yes, the Rail Tie Wind Project will pay Federal income tax. Additionally, it will pay sales and use tax, the wind excise tax, and property taxes to the State of Wyoming and to Albany County.

586

02:02:57.840 --> 02:03:06.120

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question: Will those who submitted public comment and received a response from WAPA have an opportunity to provide a counter response?

587

02:03:07.230 --> 02:03:08.310

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

588

02:03:09.450 --> 02:03:22.380

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Responses to comments and questions will be made in the final EIS through changes to the document text and, possibly, a comment response table in the final EIS. Additional comments can be made throughout the NEPA process.

589

02:03:48.630 --> 02:03:53.790

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question: What tax incentive does ConnectGen receive from the Federal Government?

590

02:03:55.560 --> 02:03:56.700

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

591

02:03:57.780 --> 02:04:05.220

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Once built and operational, the Rail Tie Wind Project would receive the Federal production tax credit that is available for wind projects.

592

02:04:07.410 --> 02:04:11.940

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The amount of the tax credit is based on the amount of wind energy produced by the Project.

593

02:04:35.940 --> 02:04:44.640

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Looks like we have someone interested in making a comment. Emma, you're up next, you can go ahead and mute and speak when you're ready.

594

02:04:46.800 --> 02:04:57.300

Emma Clute: Thank you. Emma Clute, E-M-M-A C-L-U-T-E. I noticed that there was a written question regarding

595

02:04:58.590 --> 02:05:08.280

Emma Clute: whether the EIS indicates if this is a critical wildlife habitat and that the response was that there is no designated critical habitat

596

02:05:08.700 --> 02:05:18.120

Emma Clute: protected pursuant to the Endangered Species Act within the proposed Project's footprint and I just wanted to comment and note that

597

02:05:18.720 --> 02:05:24.630

Emma Clute: the BLM's west-wide mapping project does indicate that the Rail Tie Wind Project interrupts

598

02:05:25.170 --> 02:05:35.610

Emma Clute: the summer and year-round distribution areas for both golden and bald eagles, and that it abuts a sage-grouse General Habitat Management Area.

599

02:05:36.330 --> 02:05:46.560

Emma Clute: Now for the sage-grouse, it's not, you know they're adjacent, but I don't think that anyone has gone out to tell the sage-grouse that they're not allowed to go

600

02:05:47.220 --> 02:06:04.230

Emma Clute: into the Project Area. So, although I'm not familiar with the rules surrounding whether something is designated as a critical habitat pursuant to the specific Endangered Species Act, there are

601

02:06:05.970 --> 02:06:16.590

Emma Clute: endangered or threatened species which are living in this area and using it as a habitat, so thank you.

602

02:06:19.560 --> 02:06:20.580

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Thank you for your comment.

603

02:06:23.520 --> 02:06:24.660

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder,

604

02:06:25.710 --> 02:06:29.580

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): the queue will remain open for about another

605

02:06:30.720 --> 02:06:41.610

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): 20 to 25 minutes, so if you wish to deliver a comment, please make sure you sign up using the Raise-Hand function, or if you're joining by phone, you can dial star-nine

606

02:06:42.930 --> 02:06:44.010

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): to sign up to speak

607

02:06:46.560 --> 02:06:52.500

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): and we will continue to answer questions as responses become available.

608

02:09:14.400 --> 02:09:15.540

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder,

609

02:09:16.650 --> 02:09:24.090

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): that comments offered during this hearing will be considered, along with the written comments as the draft EIS is revised.

610

02:09:25.140 --> 02:09:39.300

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The email address, web address for the online forum, and mailing address are displayed on the screen, this information is also available on the Project website. Written comments submitted electronically by the online forum or email are preferred.

611

02:09:40.860 --> 02:09:55.980

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): WAPA will accept public input at any time during the NEPA process; however, for your comment to be fully considered when the draft EIS is revised, they must be submitted by Monday, May 17, 2021.

612

02:09:57.930 --> 02:10:04.770

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Written comments are preferred, and you're encouraged to send your comments by email or to use the online form provided on the Project website.

613

02:10:05.670 --> 02:10:18.750

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): While WAPA can receive comments through the mail, please note that access to WAPA's Headquarters Office is limited because of the COVID-19 pandemic, so written comments mailed to the WAPA Headquarters Office may be delayed in reaching the Project Team.

614

02:10:20.100 --> 02:10:33.870

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): A recording of this hearing and the hearing transcripts, including the video that was presented, will all be posted on the Project website, following the meeting. In addition, both the questions and the responses will be posted on the Project website, following the hearing.

615

02:12:51.660 --> 02:12:56.310

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, some more questions have been answered in the Q&A. I'll try and catch up with reading them.

616

02:12:58.080 --> 02:13:03.450

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question: If ice accumulates on turbine blades, how far will it be thrown?
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02:13:04.830 --> 02:13:13.530

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: The draft EIS states that ice throw from turbines may occur, up to 1.5 times the turbine blade tip height.

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02:13:23.820 --> 02:13:31.560

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question: If WAPA has never made a no-connection, a no-connect decision based on environmental concerns,

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02:13:33.450 --> 02:13:44.970

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): why should we submit concerns on the EIS? The panel's response: Environmental information is just one of several factors considered in in the decision to approve an interconnection.

620

02:13:45.570 --> 02:13:54.690

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Even within the confines of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Orders, WAPA could still use negative environmental impacts to deny an interconnection request.

621

02:14:03.360 --> 02:14:10.440

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next question: If WAPA does not have the authority to make a determination based on environmental impact, why go through this process at all?

622

02:14:11.520 --> 02:14:19.080

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: Environmental information is just one of several factors considered in the decision to approve an interconnection.

623

02:14:19.920 --> 02:14:31.050

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Even within the confines of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission Orders, WAPA could still, WAPA could use negative environmental impacts to deny an interconnection request.

624

02:14:57.870 --> 02:15:08.280

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next question: In a hearing, there are sides that ask questions and respond. I understand that you will answer questions at the end; however, this Zoom does not allow for back-and-forth conversation.

625

02:15:08.610 --> 02:15:15.240

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): How does WAPA and SWCA believe that this is a proper hearing and is fair to the public? The panel's response:

626

02:15:15.930 --> 02:15:25.950

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The Project Team will respond to as many questions as possible during the hearings, there is no difference in terms of how the Project Team will handle comments from the public, whether from an in-person or virtual hearing.

627

02:15:26.490 --> 02:15:30.270

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): All comments, regardless of the form of delivery, will be analyzed and considered.

628

02:15:30.960 --> 02:15:41.520

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Even with the opportunity for verbal comments provided by the virtual hearings, written comments provided electronically are the most effective way for the public to submit their comments and concerns about the proposed Project.

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02:15:42.000 --> 02:15:47.610

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): In our experience, written comments are usually more reasoned, complete, and better supported than verbal comments.

630

02:16:12.390 --> 02:16:27.000

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next question is kind of a three-part question: When will the correct acoustic assessment be available for public comment? Does WAPA care if Rail Tie does not meet county and state regulations? Who are the decision-makers of the record of decision for WAPA?

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02:16:28.050 --> 02:16:39.480

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel's response: WAPA is using the correct acoustic report for the EIS. The acoustic report developed for the EIS uses the "noisiest" turbine option out of the full range of turbine options

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02:16:39.900 --> 02:16:48.630

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): under review for the EIS, which is the General Electric turbine. This is appropriate because the EIS considers a range of turbine options.

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02:16:49.170 --> 02:17:00.630

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Conversely, the Albany County permit application is focused on a specific turbine type, so that acoustic report focuses specifically on the V150-4.2 turbine.

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02:17:02.340 --> 02:17:08.850

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Both the EIS and the Albany County permit applications are using the correct acoustic reports for their respective purposes.

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02:17:10.380 --> 02:17:19.320

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): WAPA has and will continue to consider if the Project meets county and state regulations; however, there are separate processes for the county and state permits.

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02:17:20.670 --> 02:17:35.040

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Concurrences are made by the NEPA document manager, environmental team lead, natural resources manager, public affairs office, chief operations officer, and general counsel's office. The decision is then made by WAPA's administrator.

637

02:17:50.190 --> 02:17:57.570

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next question: Can updated and accurate of wind turbine placement, concerned blasting will affect my water well?

638

02:17:59.970 --> 02:18:06.780

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: The NEPA process began when ConnectGen was early in their engineering design, and as such was

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02:18:07.380 --> 02:18:18.750

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): conducted to consider impacts from the range of turbine models being considered. ConnectGen has advanced their design at this point, focusing on 120 turbines (Vestas 4.2-megawatt),

640

02:18:20.280 --> 02:18:31.410

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): that are 590 feet tall. The EIS analyzed—analysis is inclusive of this model and therefore remains a valid disclosure of the impacts expected.

641

02:18:43.710 --> 02:18:51.720

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next question: Why not rehab wind farms in Oklahoma and California instead of causing further damage to our natural landscape?

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02:18:53.550 --> 02:19:03.030

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And the panel's response: When identifying sites for wind development, ConnectGen considers both greenfield locations as well as opportunities to re-power older wind projects.

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02:19:03.960 --> 02:19:15.720

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The Rail Tie Wind Project location was selected due to a number of factors including wind resource, availability of transmission, and environmental factors.

644

02:19:20.040 --> 02:19:33.780

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The next question: The EIS suggests that local fire departments can respond to any fires in the Project Area. Has there been any analysis of the rate at which potential grass fires could spread versus the response times of the local fire departments?

645

02:19:35.430 --> 02:19:47.100

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: This specific question was not identified during the public scoping period; therefore, the specific analysis of the rate of spread versus local response time was not analyzed in the draft EIS.

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02:19:47.640 --> 02:19:53.640

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Additional information on wildfire impacts is described in section 3.16 of the draft EIS.

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02:20:49.440 --> 02:20:50.520

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just as a reminder.

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02:20:52.050 --> 02:20:59.310

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The public hearing portion of our meeting will conclude when everyone has had a chance to speak. If you still wish to

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02:21:00.120 --> 02:21:15.180

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): deliver a verbal comment, please use the Q&A or, excuse me, the Raise-Hand button at the bottom of your screen, or if you're joining us by phone, please dial star-nine. We will take signups to speak for the next 9 minutes.

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02:22:19.830 --> 02:22:23.550

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, while we're waiting, I'll go ahead and continue answering some questions.

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02:22:24.690 --> 02:22:32.580

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): It appears from the maps that some wind turbines will be closer to public roads than 1.5 times the turbine height. Is this true?

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02:22:33.900 --> 02:22:35.010

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response:

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02:22:36.660 --> 02:22:51.150

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Yes, the 1,000-foot siting corridors studied in the draft EIS were designed to meet the Albany County zoning ordinance and associated setback requirements, which includes a 1.1 times tip height set back from public roads and railroads.

654

02:25:10.980 --> 02:25:23.310

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next question: Given that the sighting corridors studied in the draft EIS are closer to public roads than 1.5 times the turbine height, why was ice throw not considered a threat to public health and safety?

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02:25:26.700 --> 02:25:35.190

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): The panel's response: Ice throw was considered as an impact to public health and safety in section 3.10 of the draft EIS.

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02:27:00.990 --> 02:27:01.410

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay.

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02:27:04.470 --> 02:27:08.340

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Just a reminder that the queue for speaking will close in 3 minutes.

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02:27:09.420 --> 02:27:21.060

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): So if you wish to deliver a verbal comment during this public hearing, please raise your hand using the Raise-Hand button or dial star-nine if you're joining us by telephone, to sign up to speak.

659

02:27:22.860 --> 02:27:26.970

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): At 3:30, we will stop accepting signups to speak.

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02:27:41.550 --> 02:27:45.090

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, while we're waiting, I'll read another question and answer.

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02:27:46.950 --> 02:28:06.690

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): So, the question is: The current acoustical assessment technical report shows that the proposed Project will NOT meet the county regulation of "not to exceed" 55 dBA at a non-participating property line. It will violate this regulation at in many locations. The panel's response:

662

02:28:07.710 --> 02:28:16.350

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): WAPA's EIS is an entirely separate process from the Albany County permitting process. The turbine option and layout being permitted through the

663

02:28:16.800 --> 02:28:30.600

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Albany County WECS permit process does comply with the 55 dBa noise limit at non-participating property lines, as shown by the acoustic report submitted with the county permit application.

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02:28:53.490 --> 02:29:06.810

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Next question: Is habitat protected for eagles? The panel's response: Neither the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and/or Endangered Species Act...

665

02:29:09.750 --> 02:29:20.910

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Sorry, let me start the response again. Federal laws, notably the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act, Migratory Bird Treaty Act, and Endangered Species Act, do not protect habitat of eagles.

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02:29:21.690 --> 02:29:31.620

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): However, eagles do have more protections than other bird species, notably around nests that are even inactive, defined by lack of eggs or checks.

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02:30:07.950 --> 02:30:10.080

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Okay, so the queue is now closed.

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02:30:11.310 --> 02:30:16.470

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): And since there is no one left in the queue, that also concludes our comment period.

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02:30:21.150 --> 02:30:27.420

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Any remaining questions will be—the responses to those will be posted

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02:30:30.660 --> 02:30:39.270

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): after the meeting on the Project website. On behalf of Western Area Power Administration, thank you for participating in this public hearing.

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02:30:40.140 --> 02:30:45.750

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Comments offered during this hearing will be considered, along with written comments, as the draft EIS is revised.

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02:30:46.560 --> 02:30:51.840

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Please be advised, if you attempted to submit comments using the Q&A function,

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02:30:52.620 --> 02:31:09.510

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): the Q&A function is not an official avenue for submitting comments on the draft EIS or the Project. Please submit your comments in writing through one of the addresses—the email address, the online form, or the mailing address displayed on your screen.

674

02:31:12.270 --> 02:31:20.580

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): This information is also available on the Project website. Written comments submitted electronically by the online form or email are preferred.

675

02:31:21.660 --> 02:31:35.400

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): WAPA will accept public input at any time during the NEPA process; however, for your comments to be fully considered when the draft EIS is revised, they must be submitted by Monday, May 17, 2021.

676

02:31:36.450 --> 02:31:43.530

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): Written comments are preferred, and you are encouraged to send your comments via email or use the online form provided in the Project website.

677

02:31:44.490 --> 02:31:57.150

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): While WAPA can receive comments through the mail, please note that access to WAPA's Office Headquarters Office is limited because of the COVID-19 pandemic, so written comments mailed to the WAPA Headquarters Office may be delayed in reaching the Project Team.

678

02:31:58.560 --> 02:32:10.680

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): A recording of this hearing and hearing transcripts will be posted on the Project website following the meeting. In addition, both the questions and responses will also be posted on the Project website, following the hearing.

679

02:32:12.060 --> 02:32:16.140

Sarah Lupis (SWCA): This concludes today's hearing. Thank you again for your participation.