

Some projects make sense. Some are misguided.

The project in question is the industrial-scale wind farm for electricity production proposed for ridges overlooking Rio Dell and Ferndale. I fear that this fits into the category of “doesn’t make sense.”

Let’s make the assumption that the 99% of the scientific community that understand climate science are correct in stating that the burning of carbon-based fuels is a major contributor to the climate change we’ve been experiencing and are expected to see accelerate. Accepting this as fact, we are now compelled to drastically alter the worldwide practice of using carbon for the majority of our fuels. Fortunately, without waiting for a major breakthrough, we have options that are ready for the here and now.

Seeing the needs, various projects, both large and small, have been proposed. Some make good sense.

Many calculations and statistics are summoned to bolster a given viewpoint. The presentations range from truth to hyperbole to bizarre lies. Bringing this back to our question of what are the best ways to produce large volumes of renewable electricity and heat, let’s consider the local options and include some of the less discussed consequences.

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One of the many proposals is roof top solar. These systems can harvest heat for hot water and/or space heating (aka solar thermal). Or a roof top can produce electricity. Or both forms of energy can be produced on the houses associated with these productive roof areas. These systems displace the burning of carbon-based fuels and make sense both financially and for our collective energy use.

Moderate sized roof top systems also make sense such as can be installed on larger industrial buildings. A building with a photovoltaic (PV) system can produce more electricity than is needed and sell the excess back to the shared electric grid. Given that too few roofs currently have roof top solar, the surplus electricity would be used and purchased by a neighboring building/business. These, too, make sense.

The good sense for the projects described above could be greatly enhanced with changes to the pricing structures created and used by power companies that truly encourage roof top solar. This is the law of the land in many countries worldwide. Less true in the United States.

Looking at our local potentials for residential and business roof top solar, there are thousands of roofs available that could be producing useful heat and electricity.



One obvious place to begin is the rental market. Many houses are owned by a landlord and lived in by a renter. The renter, often those who are not in a financial position to own, has been entirely left out of any advantages that solar has to offer. Under current rules, the landlord could receive a 30% federal tax credit and an accelerated depreciation for the solar project(s). The renter monthly rent + utility bill would be lower with the solar production. This fact would yield lower vacancy rates on solarized houses. Landlords win. Renters win. Less carbon burned means we all win.

If we use the most narrow of calculations, the 150 megawatt, \$200 million dollar proposed cost for the wind farm could purchase roof top solar for 16,326 houses with a total rating of 57.1 megawatts. This calculation uses the most expensive current pricing for roof top projects. The reality is the economy of scale (installing an entire neighborhood vs. a single home) would lower the price per house. The new lower costs would mimic solarizing an industrial building or parking lot yielding even more electric generation per dollar.

It should escape no one's notice that the number of solar installation jobs would be welcomed. Also, no new roads or powerlines, with both construction and maintenance costs, would be needed. Money would stay local.

Some projects make sense. Roof top solar for both electricity and hot water make sense for household budgets, county economics, self reliance, and environmental progress. Projects that benefit the most people for the most good make sense.

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