

Humboldt Wind Project Planner
County of Humboldt
Planning and Building Department

Dear Humboldt Wind Project Planner,

There is no doubt that impending climate catastrophe is the critical issue of this century, and the outstanding Constitutional question, in that future generations are being discriminated against with every year we neglect to address the our atmospheric degradation with greenhouse gases.

The Terra-Gen wind project however is folly. The proposal appears at first to be a “Sophie’s Choice” scenario, posing the creation of a carbon-free energy generation installation, against the preservation of critically important species habitat. We need and want both.

However, on closer examination, the analogy reveals itself to be false. The Terra-gen wing generators will produce 155 megawatts of electricity for possibly thirty years. The douglas fir and redwoods inhabiting over a thousand acres which will be sacrificed to build this project are the two most efficient trees in the world from the perspective of carbon sequestration. They will continue to perform this function for centuries. And the tons upon tons of soil, the other important terrestrial reservoir for carbon fixation, which the project will have obliterated, could continue to function as a carbon sink for an equal length of time, in tandem with the trees.

The DEIR has not calculated the carbon sequestration factor which the “no project” option offers. The forest and soils, on the almost-1000 acres, where the road is to be built, and in the 303-acre projected path of the cable connecting the project to Bridgeville, are treasures. They cost nothing, as they quietly grow and fix carbon. They also provide habitat for wildlife, the public trust resource which is being weighed against the generators in the Sophie’s Choice analogy. Life is a web, in which the survival of species depends upon other species, sometimes in ways which humans discover too late. The lives of our grandchildren and great grandchildren will extend far beyond the life span of these generators. The trees and soil slated for sacrifice by this project however will be there for them,, faithfully sequestering greenhouse gases,

Carbon sequestration by trees and soil costs nothing. The Terr-Gen project on the other hand, if created, will cost taxpayers millions of dollars in tax write-offs for Terra-Gen and Stantec, as they construct the generators, and then later in deterioration costs for the next thirty years, as well as in increased electricity bills. The third richest man in the world, Warren Buffett, who has invested in many wind farms, has remarked “we get a tax credit when we build a wind farm. That’s the only reason to build them. They don’t make sense without a tax credit”.

Although the Terra-Gen project tries to finesse all other environmental concerns with the climate catastrophe threat, its own interest are nakedly for-profit just as much as Mr. Buffett’s. Stantec, the corporation which is providing environmental and geotechnical services for Terra-Gen, is heavily involved in the infamous Keystone XL pipeline and divisions of the equally disreputable Kellogg Brown and Root. This is not necessarily a reflection on their engineering capabilities in this project, only on their cynicism and potential ruthlessness as the enterprise establishes itself in our county.

It is also cynical to have chosen a location adjacent to one of Humboldt’s most precious treasures, Rockefeller Forest and the high conservation valley forests of the Mattole valley. I am stunned that Humboldt Redwood Company, a certified-sustainable timber corporation, would have turned over more than a thousand acres to be ruined for tree growth forever. It is owned by the Fisher family, of whom member Robert Fisher is vice-chair of California’s Strategic Growth Council, was once on the boards of NRDC, and is presently a trustee of Conservation International. This project is certainly not a sustainable one and as such violates the FSC principles HRC signed on to. Heretofore they have been very defensive about controlling their timber-producing land base, as the Lost Coast League knows all too well. The tax write-off must be irresistible.



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The DEIR does not discuss possible effects of these giant generators on nearby Rockefeller Forest and the redwood trees along the Avenue of the Giants as they are difficult to identify and quantify because of the long life cycle and slowness of change in these marvelous creatures. Many of the trees appear already to be stressed, possibly by drought in dry years, or by dwindling fog brought about by climate warming or relentless timber harvesting or the effects of traffic. Regardless of the cause, no risks can be taken which might increase cumulative effects. In this context, doubts have been raised regarding a possible wind shadow, or a drying and warming effect Brought about by the slowing of wind caused by the wind generators. I am aware, as I am sure, are you, of studies performed in other areas of the country, for example in the corn belt, where the air temperature has been increased by wind turbines.

A UN study recently made public a study which documents the probable demise of over a million species in the next couple of decades .In our county, animal and plant habitats and their resident populations have been decimated by human activity over the last 150 years since the arrival in Humboldt County of European settlers. New housing developments, logging and marijuana growing have removed the shelter, protection and food supplies provided by forests , the massive spread pesticides have altered species composition in woodlands and prairies, and automobile use requirements have buried acres and acres in cement. In all of North America there is no more intact habitat anywhere, only fragments.

Some of these fragments still exist in our county and they offer the best hope for restoration. I am a physician assistant at Open Door Clinic which provides health care for a large proportion of Humboldt's population. When we treat a burn we are encouraged when there is at least a patch of skin which has not received a full-thickness burn. Recovery is able to spread out from these places. In contrast there are many areas in the United States which have been destroyed for a practical eternity. In Humboldt the best contribution we can make to reverse climate change is to throw energy behind the regeneration of our forests, rivers and meadows , not industrializing areas where there is hope of recovery with giant projects like Terra-gen's. Equal amounts of wind – generated electricity can be produced by replacing the defunct wind generators lingering off-line in Terra-gen's many other projects. Repairing or replacing these turbines may not generate the same generous tax breaks for Terra-gen and Stantec, but they will produce energy if put back online and will not destroy those powerful carbon-sequesterers, our forests.

Recent comprehensive UN studies have caused a certain unhealthy hysteria. The recognition that we have twelve years to change our ways before total catastrophe becomes inevitable is causing us to reach for any solution which will provide relief. In such an atmosphere people are more likely to be lazy, and pay a high price for turning their own powerful resource over to unscrupulous profit-seeking entities, to solve the problem for them.

In summary, opposing the Terra-gen wind project is not NIMBYism, unless you regard the entire planet as Humboldt's back yard. The wind generators do not reduce CO2 emissions, they merely produce electricity. This is made clear in the proposal. Terra-gen has no plan for reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Quite the contrary: in the construction of these generators they not only generate greenhouse gas, but also damage our terrestrial carbon sinks, the forests and the soils.

Yours,

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(Cont.)