



RE: Proposed Solar Complex

Date: May 13, 2021

To: Yakima County Commissioners

Dear Commissioners,

This correspondence is from the Yakima County Farm Bureau (YCFB). YCFB is a grass roots organization with 2700 members consisting of farmers and ranchers with operations both large and small as well as other folks with interest in agriculture affairs in Yakima and Klickitat Counties.

It has come to the attention of our Farm Bureau that a series of large solar industrial complexes are being planned in the proximity of the town of Moxee and eastward to the area of the Silver Dollar. Though we have more to learn about the elements of this proposal we are deeply concerned by what we have discovered thus far.

As a representative of our member farmers and ranchers, we believe in preserving farm and ranch lands for future generations while respecting property rights of owners of private lands who are currently on the land. We also respect and encourage a diverse choice of power sources including renewable alternatives like solar. We believe that energy is very important to our economy.

The YCFB understands that there is a legal mechanism where the Governor can unilaterally approve this project without addressing local concerns. We believe this is wrong.

Our Farm Bureau believes that local input and decision making is essential in this case for there are far too many factors that will not be properly weighed under the Governors Fast Track authority.

The YCFB understands that one of the proposed solar complexes (about 3,000 acres) would likely boarder with some very high value crops on its western edge. Around the immediate area there are working farms (including the land to be converted) and there are many smaller parcels with homes and families that would be impacted. Other proposed complexes are farther east and range from 600 acres in scope to a larger installation located near the Silver Dollar.

The YCFB believes that a land owner has a right to sell or rent their land at a good profit if they chose, that's an integral part of the property rights. However, other affected landowners **also** have a right to enjoy their property as well and to continue to farm and/or live in comparative harmony and a project of this scope, location and nature raises serious concerns.

Some of these concerns include the probable devaluation of properties adjacent and/or in view of this proposal. The area west of the largest proposed complex contains several farms where high value crops are raised and the scenic value is such that many folks who are non-farming residents have bought property, built homes and chose to live there. It is a value also cherished by the long standing farming and ranching community as well.

Our understanding is that a cyclone fence would be constructed around the perimeter of these large solar complexes. That raises the issue of wildlife concentration around the perimeter and their out of proportion impacts on remaining landowners, particularly large wild migrating ungulates. Further, if these solar complexes are intruding on Critical Areas, with respect to attaining and/or maintaining bench marks under the Voluntary Stewardship Program, that relationship could be jeopardized.

The entire area in question is very prone to massive wild fires and the YCFB believes that solar panels burning would constitute a dire air quality emergency. Large scale evacuations would likely result. Recent wildfires in the area have caused serious health hazards with only native vegetation burning, imagine several hundred acres of solar panels also ablaze. One must also understand that the first rule of fire fighter safety is to not venture beyond the "first electric wires".

Another serious concern is how storm and snow melt runoff would be affected by large-scale 600 to 3,000 acre solar complexes where the solar panels create un-natural runoff conditions and the vegetation management is likely to exacerbate the problem as well. The nature of the light easily transported soils in that area are not only prone to erosion by sudden cloud burst but also are quite subject to being displaced by wind. There is a growing likely hood that solar panels in their automated movement to best utilize the suns energy, will behave like a wind foil and while at an angle to the surrounding land thus redirect, concentrate and multiply the wind force at each panel certain times of the day. The YCFB believes that soil erosion and water quality will be degraded via both water and wind forces given these potential conditions.

Further, the YCFB believes that good tillable lands are the least desirable to site an industrial sized solar complex upon and the most desirable to retain for agricultural production and instead, one should be able to find less agriculturally productive lands with reasonable access to the power grid that solar power generation can be more wisely accomplished upon.

A wind turbine is said to be equal to 25 acres of solar panels in generating capacity but occupies just ¼ acre. That is a ratio of 100 to 1 and the area around a turbine is still farmable and grazable. The solar complexes proposed offer no other value other than electrical generation but at a high cost of lost agricultural production relative to wind turbines as proposed. The YCFB believes this is unwise and would suggest a series of modifications to these proposals that could mitigate some of our concerns.

The YCFB believes that a better approach would be to break up the solar complexes into smaller sub-sets of a few hundred acres, fenced and located on lands of lower productivity. The grazability can be retained by elevating the panels which is being successfully accomplished in other areas of the United States and other Nations. Vegetation management would be enhanced by maintaining grazing potential. The negative effects of soil erosion by wind and water would be spread out and partially defused.

Our Farm Bureau has other concerns we would like to share with the Commission about this matter at an appropriate time. We believe that Yakima County and its locally affected citizens is the fair and proper arbitrator of this matter. A Fast Track process conducted in the Governor's administration is not appropriate or wise and forces people negatively affected by its unilateral decision making to live with the "fallout" without the decision makers being similarly affected.

The YCFB believes that if this proposal was to surface with in the area of the I5 corridor or even more appropriately adjacent to the Capital, it would not even "make it to paper".

Sincerely,

Mark Herke

President, Yakima County Farm Bureau