

Chairman Deschamps wondered how many will be lit with FAA lights. Mr. Rayhill stated they don't have any control over that but are working with biologists because different types of lights attract different types of activity. Mr. Rayhill noted FAA will tell Ridgeline how the turbines will be lit.

Commissioner Turpin wondered if they have negotiated long term leases with the landowners. Mr. Rayhill stated they have except with the state, the lease is 40 years with an option of 10 additional years. Commissioner Turpin wondered if there has ever been a fire in the windmill generating sites, in which Mr. Rayhill stated there has been. Commissioner Turpin pointed out they will only be using 40 feet of suppression area of gravel around these and it is not going to take much to come outside that zone and start a fire. Mr. Rayhill explained the transformers are generally where the fire starts, so they have a separate metal containment building within 10 feet of the turbine base that houses the transformer and that is within the 40 foot gravel setback. Mr. Rayhill noted there is smoke detection equipment in these which is analyzed in real time and would get instantaneous notification if there was a problem. Commissioner Turpin wondered why they are not going to break the compaction when they revegetate back to 16 feet. Mr. Rayhill stated if they need to work on a machine, then they have to bring the crane back, and they don't want to have to redo the road work in that case. Commissioner Turpin pointed out the potential for water erosion down the compacted soil, which is not present with the natural ground around it that can absorb. Mr. Rayhill noted this all has to go into road building design, best management practices, and the storm water prevention plan.

APPLICANT TESTIMONY

Randy Gardner, project manager for Ridgeline Energy

Chairman Deschamps wondered if they will manage from the current center or build another building to manage this section. Mr. Rayhill stated they will build another one. Chairman Deschamps asked where this would be. Mr. Gardner noted the first best guess is on the Stollworthy property because there is better access, or on top at the Hansen, Boeings or Webb property, located somewhere off a county road so they have access to it. Mr. Gardner stated it would have to be plowed in.

TESTIMONY IN FAVOR—NONE

TESTIMONY NON-COMMITAL

Kraig Grubaugh, 149 W 210 N

Mr. Grubaugh pointed out when Ridgeline came to get their first approval, there was a lot of talk they were going to hire locals and suggested checking to see if they really do that. Mr. Grubaugh noted the people who bought the power are probably somewhere in California, Oregon, or back east and most of the cost is debt service because these machines are expensive. Mr. Grubaugh stated the company is from Seattle and the people who are doing the loans are probably from New York or Chicago, but it is the people who live here that get to look at these big windmills.

Jim Mende, Environmental Staff Biologist, Fish and Game, Pocatello

Mr. Mende informed the Commission he, along with his counterpart in Idaho Falls, has been speaking with Ridgeline on this project, as well as some others, discussing studies they believe are appropriate for the resident wildlife in the area. Mr. Mende pointed out the new versions of wind farms do not provide perches for birds and the blade speeds are slow enough many organisms can avoid them. Mr. Mende noted there are locations where there are mortalities but the reasons why this happens are complex, such as bird species, meteorology, low ceilings, and light conditions. Mr. Mende stated he would encourage some language in the permit that would encourage the developer to continue discussions with Fish and Game.

Commissioner Schneider noted the lower speeds are probably not causing turbulence on the back side and wondered what the attraction is to birds. Mr. Mende stated the low sounds may be confusing to bats, which may be why they get in trouble, but for birds it is a visual thing.

Chairman Deschamps stated his concern is with the lack of information on the effect for big game and wondered if Mr. Mende has seen any studies in the current wind farm that would indicate they avoid these areas. Mr. Mende explained anything with that big of physical presence would give any organism a bit of a shock, although they can't demonstrate that with research data. Mr. Mende stated they don't have the information to say the migrations are altered and noted anytime there are more roads and more access, people will find their way in. With this come more disturbances, which is demonstrably a bad thing for wildlife. Mr. Mende pointed out the question about ground nesting birds and noted they haven't demonstrated where large numbers of the population are avoiding those areas.

Chairman Deschamps asked if there are concerns with stream issues where there will be road building. Mr. Mende stated his experience with the Goshen location is they do a fairly good job with stream crossings.

Commissioner Turpin asked if there are any migration patterns that criss cross this area in the bird populations. Mr. Mende informed the Commission they don't have a great deal of information on migration patterns and pointed out there is a critical winter range area inside this larger area.

Commissioner Nelson wondered if Mr. Mende had any other concerns that hadn't been mentioned. Mr. Mende stated they do have concerns about these large installations altering the environment and remaining there for the next 50 to 100 years.

TESTIMONY IN OPPOSITION

LaVar Jolley, Firth, Idaho

Mr. Jolley wondered why the people in Bingham County pay the cost of providing power to buyers out of California, Utah, and Oregon. Mr. Jolley pointed out in the Planning & Zoning Ordinance, one issue to look at is if it alters the essential characteristics of the property's historical use and wondered how 300 massive wind turbines in one of the most scenic areas in the county does not alter scenic value or the historical use of the property.