

Comments on Senate Bill 455

My family first became stewards of the Flint Hills Tallgrass Prairie in 1868 when my great, great granddad brought his family to Chase County from what was then the lush prairie of southwest Indiana. I am the 5th generation to have the privilege of owning, managing, and preserving native grassland in Kansas.

Most Kansans appreciate the unique, timeless beauty of the Flint Hills and understand the importance of protecting this endangered ecosystem. Reasonable people know there is something very wrong about "industrializing" the last significant expanse of Tallgrass Prairie in America. The more people learn about the prospect of constructing industrial wind energy complexes in the Flint Hills, the more concerned they become. Even wind energy development corporations acknowledge their turbines have a certain amount of negative impact, yet they continue to search for ways to justify their pursuit of profit at our expense. What angers many people is that our government is helping in this pursuit through tax credits, tax shelters, and tax exemptions; and these tax incentives don't discriminate between areas of special beauty and heritage, as opposed to industrial zones.

Industrial wind facilities only benefit a few landowners -- at the expense of neighboring landowners and the general public. Because only a few landowners receive any dollars, these facilities are not a meaningful help to the agricultural and ranching community at large.

We have other routes to help preserve both the land and the rancher. Conservation easements, securing federal dollars for grassland reserve programs, and tourism are some examples underway. These things can move us where we need to go, together, as a community.

But communities across the nation find that when large industrial turbines are forced on them, unity begins to erode. People are not forgiving when it comes to the significant alteration of their once-scenic environment. They are not forgiving when the value of real estate is reduced. They are not forgiving when they realize that an out-of-state or foreign corporation has exploited and divided their community. And they will not be forgiving when their rich cultural heritage is stolen by government financed (via tax shelters) destruction of the prairie. Sadly, it's difficult for communities to ever again achieve unity when the cause of disharmony (turbines) looms on the horizon as a constant reminder of what has been lost.

I am a champion of "landowner rights." But all of us who own pristine Flint Hills land have rights -- not just those who decide to cash in on short term profits at the prairie's expense. As landowners we should be able to protect the value of our property, to maintain our scenic landscapes, to retain our agricultural heritage, to protect our unique ecosystem from being industrialized by hundreds of wind turbines.

Most people acknowledge there are places that should not be subjected to industrialization. The Flint Hills is one of those places. When developers suddenly appeared on the scene we were not prepared to deal with the challenges the industry brought with it. The people of Kansas may not know what the perfect solution to siting wind turbines is, but we do know that allowing them everywhere makes no sense. This is a state-wide issue, and the state needs time to plan a reasonable approach to siting wind energy plants. What that solution will be.... we don't need to agree on today. Please declare a moratorium and allow time for the state to make wise decisions on the preservation of our prairie landscape.

Please don't let this opportunity pass. The Flint Hills may not have another chance. Send Senate Bill 455 on to the full senate for consideration.

Larry R. Patton

5694 N.W. 50th

El Dorado, Kansas 67042

620-752-3455

