

Terra-Gen wind energy official defends project as public blasts impacts

Project scaled back from 60 to 47 turbines along ridges

By [SHOMIK MUKHERJEE](#) | smukherjee@times-standard.com | Times-Standard

PUBLISHED: November 7, 2019 at 9:00 pm | UPDATED: November 7, 2019 at 9:02 pm

As the controversial Terra-Gen wind energy project reached the Humboldt County Planning Commission table on Thursday for the first of a two-part public hearing, its numerous critics came out in full force, chorusing the project's potential negative impacts as they filled the commission's meeting chamber to the brim.

Terra-Gen proposes to build 47 wind turbines — down from an earlier plan of 60 turbines — on the Bear River and Monument Ridges above the town of Scotia in the Eel River Valley. The selling point is simple: Climate change is imminent and the wind farm would provide a crucial alternative to fossil fuels.

"This is an opportunity for Humboldt County to do something about global warming at a local level," said Nathan Vajdos, the company's senior director of wind development.

While Thursday's meeting saw a Terra-Gen presentation, a round of commissioner questions and extensive public comment, the real deal will be a second public hearing on Nov. 14, when the commission is expected to make a decision on the wind turbines.

Regardless of the commission's vote, the project can be appealed to the county Board of Supervisors at a later date.

Vajdos spoke at length Thursday to argue that Terra-Gen is far from a nefarious corporation. He touted the project's zero emissions, reduction of greenhouse gases and upgrades to the county's troubled energy infrastructure.

"Corporations are not popular in Humboldt County — let's just acknowledge that — but we will immediately become the second-largest taxpayer in the county," Vajdos said.

He did, however, concede that the turbines will be built on a site with Wiyot cultural resources, which he called a "significant and unavoidable" impact.



The Humboldt County Courthouse was packed to capacity for the Planning Commission's public hearing on Thursday. (Shomik Mukherjee — The Times-Standard)

In response to the plan, the public had already voiced a long list of the project's potential negative impacts, enough to prompt a litany of responses by the company in an over 800-page final environmental impact report.

At public comment on Thursday, most speakers were not impressed by Terra-Gen's pitch.

Michael Evenson of environmental group the Lost Coast League pointed out that Terra-Gen is owned by Energy Capital Partners, a private equity firm, which he called a "mega-corporation" that invests in hydraulic fracturing for oil.

"The commitment of the (Terra-Gen) owners isn't necessarily to renewables, it's to making money," Evenson said, saying the company's admission of "significant unavoidable impacts" gives the commission the opportunity, outright, to reject the project.

Geneva Thompson, associate general counsel for the Yurok Tribe, outlined the invasion upon cultural resources and landscapes, saying the project would harm the California condor. Tom Wheeler of the Environmental Protection Information Center in Arcata said the project still needs to mitigate for all of its impacts before it could move forward.

A longtime Scotia resident called the turbines a "set of space-aged fans."

At press time, members of the public were still speaking. Terra-Gen's next chance to defend itself will be at the Planning Commission's Nov. 14 meeting.