

Town of Windham, Vermont

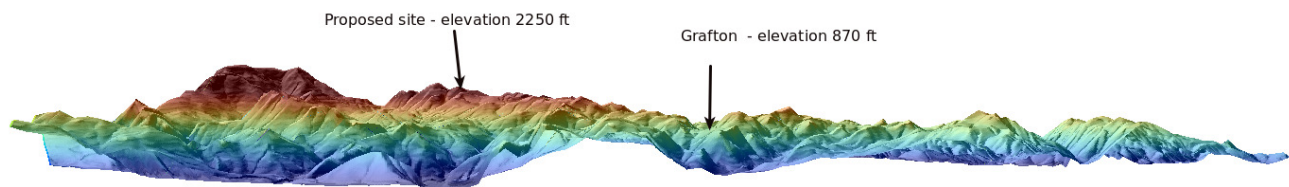
Dear Ms Briot:

Thank you for your letter of June 13, 2016.

From the perspective of the Selectboard and Planning Commission of the Town of Windham, the Stiles Brook Forest, sixty percent of which lies within our town, is *not* appropriate for your proposed industrial wind installation. The Windham Town Plan expressly forbids industrial wind and is based on years of careful study. The reasons for our perspective are outlined below:

Topography

Almost all of the town of Windham lies above 1500 feet in elevation; Windham is the highest town of all those surrounding it. The terrain slopes markedly toward Grafton to the east.



Windham contributes to three watersheds and Saxtons River originates here. The South fork of Saxtons River, which floods Grafton approximately every seven years, originates almost entirely on the site you propose for an industrial wind installation.

Flooding/erosion

As you may be aware, flooding and soil erosion are common events in this part of Vermont, and Grafton is particularly susceptible. Your proposed project would require extensive blasting, bulldozing, and impervious surfacing of the high-elevation Stiles Brook Forest, and is thus at odds with crucial flood management initiatives and practices of the town, the region, and the state.

Climate change is projected to bring to the northeastern U.S. a substantial increase in the frequency of heavy downpours; in recent years, we have observed an increase in winter precipitation occurring as rain. The state of Vermont has initiatives in place to cope with these events, emphasizing maintenance of intact forests. The Secretary of the Agency of Natural Resources, Deb Markowitz, writes: “We learned some important lessons from [Tropical Storm] Irene. Healthy forests that absorb rainfall, and flood plains that give rivers room to spill out and dissipate energy, will temper the immense power of floodwaters *before* they inflict costly damage to our town centers.” Every session of the Vermont legislature produces additional legislation on maintaining healthy forests for flood control purposes.

Most importantly, *Windham will not support a project that places our downstream neighbors at increased risk for flooding.* We take an ethical and moral stance in relation to our neighbors in Grafton, Saxtons River, and Cambridgeport, and we abide by the dictum proposed by Wendell Berry: “Do unto those downstream as you would have those upstream do unto you.”

Wildlife

The proposed site is one of the largest unfragmented habitat blocks remaining in southern Vermont. Vermont legislators are active in writing laws to protect wildlife habitat blocks and connecting corridors. The Stiles Brook Forest is known to be a significant habitat for bear and moose, and it is an important path during fall hawk migration. The site contains and is surrounded by wetlands, the preservation of which is taken seriously by the state of Vermont as demonstrated by the fact that individuals are subject to heavy fines for damaging wetlands.

Water Quality

Climate change combined with destruction of forest and exposure of erodible soils would increase storm water runoff, and the runoff would be more heavily laden with particulate matter that degrades stream quality. We are particularly concerned with this issue because we know that experimental storm water control devices that are specifically prohibited by the Windham Town Plan were permitted by the Vermont Public Service Board for the Lowell Mountain wind turbine installation. These devices were permitted on condition of enhanced monitoring that has not been carried out according to the requirements of the permit; we also know that state of Vermont personnel who should have overseen the required monitoring did not do so. Given these facts, we might be excused for our heightened level of anxiety about this issue.

Human population

The most egregious aspect of your determination that “the Stiles Brook Forest site is well-suited for a wind project” is that you ignore the proximity of a human population the size of which is unprecedented in this region and perhaps in the U.S. as a whole. Over 200 Windham homes lie within 1.5 miles of at least one turbine. The turbines you propose are the largest deployed for onshore use, and your own wind industry experts agree that noise and infrasound increase with turbine size. Throughout the world, industrial wind turbine neighbors complain of adverse health effects from proximity to industrial-scale turbines. *We are unwilling to subject any of our town's property owners to the unknown short- and longterm effects of exposure to turbine noise, vibration, infrasound, and shadow flicker.* In addition, we find your repeated dismissal of the question of proximity troubling, as is your lack of truthfulness about the problems your company has experienced with turbine neighbors who have been sickened, annoyed, and deprived of quiet use of their property by your activities. In particular, we are following closely the suit brought by neighbors of Iberdrola's Hardscrabble project in New York.

Given the marked unsuitability of the Stiles Brook Forest for an industrial wind installation, we ask that you suspend your involvement with this project immediately. We will also propose to the land owner, Meadowsend Timberlands Ltd., that they engage the town in discussion that could lead to the town's acquisition of the property, so that it might be preserved for the good of us all, as opposed to its being utilized to enrich parties with no concern for our town, our region, and our people.

Thank you for the opportunity to share our thoughts with you regarding this issue.

Sincerely,

Frank Seawright, Chair, Town of Windham Selectboard
Maureen Bell, Selectman
Bob Bingham, Chair, Town of Windham Planning Commission