



Harney County wind projects will create green jobs and protect wilderness

BLM Draft Environmental Impact Study shows minimal visual impacts to Steens wilderness

BURNS, Ore.—The Bureau of Land Management today released a Draft Environmental Impact Study (EIS) evaluating the transmission line and related Greater Echanis Wind Projects visual and general impacts on the environment and wilderness experience. The Draft EIS notes that the Projects—on private land—will only be visible from a tiny fraction of the Steens wilderness area. Turbines from the permitted Echanis Project would be visible from just 0.4% of the 170,000-acre Steens Wilderness.

The BLM’s impact study of the Harney County projects evaluates:

- Direct impacts of the transmission line across federal lands;
- Indirect impacts of a permitted 104 megawatt wind farm on private land; and
- Cumulative impacts of three additional wind farms proposed for private land.

The Draft EIS is available on the [BLM’s Burns District website](#).

“Our projects will help the region move forward on renewable energy while protecting one of Oregon’s special places,” said Chris Crowley, CEO of Columbia Energy Partners, developers of the renewable energy projects. “Today’s study from the BLM offers the first comprehensive analysis of how our projects minimize their visual and environmental impacts on the Steens while bringing economic vitality to one of the most depressed regions in the state.”

The Greater Echanis projects will produce enough renewable energy to power more than 120,000 homes while driving \$1 billion of private investment into an area struggling with near Depression-level unemployment.

No wind turbines will be placed inside the Steens Mountain Wilderness or on restricted public lands. The projects will comply with all environmental laws and safeguards while remaining out of sight from all but a handful of locations in the 175,000 acres of Steens Mountain Wilderness.

The wind projects are located on private property outside of the Steens Wilderness. Last month, Oregon’s Energy Facility Siting Council unanimously rejected efforts by project opponents to add new restrictions on private lands adjacent to the wilderness area. Judge Steve Grasty of Harney County stressed that the Steens Mountain Cooperative Management

and Protective Act of 2000 protects the Steens area while explicitly allowing responsible economic development on private property outside the area.

“The Steens Wilderness was designed to fit natural boundaries created by the terrain,” said Judge Grasty. “That’s how these projects can help Harney County create green jobs without sacrificing our natural heritage.”

The Greater Echanis projects offer a county facing 18.9 percent unemployment an opportunity to become part of the renewable energy economy.

“These projects will help expand Oregon’s pool of trained green-collar workers,” said Clif Davis, business manager and financial secretary of IBEW Local 48. “And they will harness some of the best wind resources in the state while driving economic benefits into one of its poorest counties.”

The public will have 45 days to review and comment on the Draft EIS. After the comment period, the BLM and cooperating agencies will work with the independent contractor responsible for the study to analyze and respond in a Final EIS (FEIS). The BLM expects to issue the FEIS in the fall.

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