

# What's Going On In Bingham County?

## And Will The Same Thing Happen Here?



**L**ast month Bingham County passed a law allowing an enormous windmill project to be built in beautiful Wolverine Canyon. In doing so, the commission seemed to ignore many aspects of the county ordinance that is intended to protect the public from obtrusive, unplanned, and damaging industrial developments in natural resource areas. The fact that the project was approved at all is alarming enough, but the strange and unexpected set of circumstances surrounding the approval process deserves closer scrutiny.

Here are some of the unusual facts surrounding last month's approval of this enormous project:

### PUTTING INDUSTRIAL INSTALLATIONS IN A NATURAL RESOURCE/AGRICULTURAL ZONE IS AGAINST THE EXISTING LAWS

- Section 2.2 of the Bingham County Zoning Ordinance defines power generation as Industrial.
- In Chapter 6 of the Zoning Ordinance it is expressly states that industrial uses are not allowed in the Natural Resource/Agricultural zone.

### THE PROJECT COVERS 20,000 ACRES!

If someone were to apply to the commission to build a tiny subdivision covering 20 acres with little log cabins anywhere in this 20,000 acres, the commission would demand to know exactly where the cabins would be built, the dimensions of the cabin, the style of the cabin, the size, style, and design of any proposed out buildings, and many other facts about the proposed project. The commission would want to know about the location of any proposed road leading to the subdivision and how that road would affect drainage, adjacent streams, the neighbors, etc. That's how the commission would normally handle the application to build a tiny 20-acre subdivision. This project is 1,000 times that size! One would not normally object to log cabins being built in such natural forest areas such as Wolverine Canyon, yet such a project would receive significant scrutiny from planning and zoning. The Ridgeline Project doesn't propose little 20-foot high log cabins built on 20 acres. It proposes 150 gigantic windmills that are each seven times taller than the tallest tree in the Wolverine Forest! And it contains 80 miles of roads which will be built in this little 10-mile-long Canyon.

### THE AMAZING APPROVAL!

- The commission approved this project without even knowing where the 80 miles of road would be built! They still don't know!
- The commission approved the project without having any commitment or specifications regarding where any of the 150 windmills would be built!
- The commission approved the project without having any commitment of where any of the three proposed gigantic industrial electrical relay stations would be built!

### NO ENVIRONMENTAL STUDY!

No environmental study was done on the proposal. Instead a "desk study" was substituted for national environmental study. The "desk study" refers to the environmental study that had been done on the tiny wind farm project out on dry farm area that you can see on the foothills above Idaho Falls. It is absurd to insert that study in Wolverine Canyon! Even though the two areas are less than 10 miles apart, the eco-

system in Wolverine Canyon is totally different than the ecosystem out on the dry farms. There are almost none of the eagles, hawks, grouse, deer, or forest birds in the dry farms that are so plentiful in Wolverine Canyon. There are no streams and no forests out on the dry farms and yet Wolverine Canyon is covered with streams and forests. In addition, the "baby" windmills that we see above Idaho Falls are only a fraction of the size of the gigantic windmills to be installed in Wolverine Canyon. Why would anyone in their right mind consider the environmental impact of the huge windmills to be installed in Wolverine, as the same impact that the tiny windmills that are now up on the dry farms have on the almost desert environment that exists there?

### PUBLIC INPUT NOT WANTED!

After the first hearing had to be rescheduled because of lack of proper public notice, two public hearings were held for public input. On the first night those opposing the project were not allowed to speak until 12 a.m.—midnight! That's right! 12 o'clock in the morning! At the second night, those against the project were not allowed to speak until 10 p.m. By then the elderly had all given up and gone home. Those with kids had all gone home to put their children to bed, and those with jobs had to leave so they would not let their employers down the next day. Those who had done tremendous research and had professional presentations against the project were not allowed to give them because time was limited to three minutes per person. Surely, a 20,000 acre project covering 35 square miles proposing 150 gigantic windmills that will destroy Wolverine Canyon forever deserves a public hearing where people could actually testify against project and where scientific data could be presented to the commission.

### WHO OWNS THESE COMPANIES?

It has been rumored that the owners of many of the wind farms are owned by some of the large oil companies that are using the tax subsidies to offset the huge profits these companies are now making by the high price of gasoline. To date we have not been able to substantiate these rumors. But it has been very difficult to determine who actually owns these wind farm projects. The tactics being used to prevent the true identity of these folks from being known leads us to believe that we ought to continue to look until we find out who is really behind these projects.

### ATTORNEYS "CONFLICTED OUT!"

All major attorney firms in Idaho have been "conflicted out" by an apparent well-organized, well-planned, and well-implemented process. It appears that a tremendous amount of preparation work was done by the huge corporations backing the windmill projects to prevent any legal challenge to the approval process. The law states that if an attorney has done work for a party, that firm cannot later work for an opposing party on a related matter. When the Coalition to Protect the Wolverine Canyon tried to find an attorney anywhere in Idaho to appeal the decision, they found that the wind farm corporations had unbeliev-

ably tied up almost every major Idaho law firm and none could legally take the case. To do so the wind farm corporations had had each large attorney firm in the state perform at least one or two hours of work, assuring that the legal firm could never be used in any legal action against these projects.

Such a concerted effort to "conflict out" every single large law firm in the state seems to indicate that something much larger is planned for Idaho by these well-funded corporations than most of us are aware of. We already know that Idaho has been designated as one of the leading states for future wind farms. What we did not know, until now, and still do not know for sure is how many windfarms are already being planned for Southeastern Idaho. But based on how much preparation has been done from a legal perspective, it appears that dozens if not hundreds of windfarms are already slated to come to Southeast Idaho. Three more are already being proposed for the area just west of Wolverine Canyon. Others are rumored to be coming soon. We are not proposing that we stop all wind farms from blanketing southeastern Idaho. We know that will happen. And perhaps that is a good thing.

We do believe, however, that some areas should be protected so that we can preserve some of the natural beauty that Idaho is known for. If windmills can be put up in Wolverine Canyon, they can be placed anywhere. No one's backyard will be protected. It is a terrible precedent to see. If we do not protect these areas they will be lost forever and Idaho will have no more natural appeal than California, Michigan, or New York. Let's pay attention to what's happening in our own backyard before it's too late.

