

CASE STUDY

Highland Wind Project



Project Summary

Call it a double victory for the state and Clean Wisconsin.

When the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin approved Highland Wind Project in late September 2013, the Commission not only started the process to bring 102.5 megawatts of clean, renewable wind energy to the state, but it validated years of arduous work on PSC 128, sensible, protective statewide rules for siting wind projects in the state.

In 2012, Emerging Energies applied to the PSC for a permit to construct Highland Wind in St. Croix County. From the start, this project faced local controversy, which continued into the proceeding at the PSC. As a top concern of local opponents was noise, Clean Wisconsin entered the case to offer evidence regarding the project's noise impacts. We retained a well-respected acoustic engineer with decades of experience siting wind projects and monitoring sound emissions post-construction.

As part of our intervention, we proposed to take measurements of low-frequency sound at an existing Wisconsin wind farm as project opponents claimed that low-frequency and inaudible infrasound from wind turbines cause negative health impacts. We hoped to add evidence to the record that would inform that debate, by showing actual sound levels. The measurements our experts took were inconclusive and showed no relationship to the residents' complaints. In the end, the Commissioners found that there was insufficient evidence in the record to deny the application based on low-frequency sound factors.

In addition, Highland was the Commission's first opportunity to apply PSC 128, the statewide wind siting rule Clean Wisconsin first advocated for in 2006 and helped draft after it passed the Legislature in 2009. Prior to this rule, wind developers faced a patchwork of local ordinances that could be designed to make turbine siting impossible. Clean Wisconsin's interest in Highland related to both the siting of this facility and in how the new siting rule would be applied.

While the PSC initially denied the application, the Commissioners reversed their initial decision and approved the project upon rehearing the case. Moreover, the Chair expressed full support for PSC 128 and applied it in this case, a great victory for Clean Wisconsin and clean energy.

Project Details

Date 2012-2013

Location St. Croix County

Project Type Renewable Energy Support

Venue PSC



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