



**House Public Utilities Committee
Testimony of Neil Voje
Blue Creek Wind Farm Plant Manager
Avangrid Renewables, LLC**

November 30, 2016

Opponent Testimony on House Bill 554

Chairman Dovilla, Vice Chair Roegner, and Ranking Member Ashford and members of the committee thank you for the opportunity to present today's testimony. I am Neil Voje, a retired Navy Special Operations Officer, and the head of operations for Avangrid Renewables Blue Creek Wind Farm. Blue Creek is a 152 turbine wind farm capable of producing 304 MW of electricity in Van Wert and Paulding Counties. The purpose of my testimony is to provide the committee with a first-hand account of the benefits Blue Creek provides to its host communities and our experience operating a commercial scale wind farm in Northwest Ohio. It is our view that wind farms like Blue Creek safely provide significant economic benefits to their host communities and that House Bill 554 should be amended to mandate renewable energy purchases for all years, not just from 2020 onwards, so that more Ohio communities can take advantage of the same benefits enjoyed by Blue Creek's host communities. Furthermore, any bill addressing the renewable portfolio standard must also address the excessive wind turbine setback requirements currently in place for new development.

Blue Creek was the largest single private investment in Ohio in 2011 at \$600 million, it put 30 Ohio companies to work on construction, and for nearly five years it has been churning out clean energy and local benefits. We generate about eight hundred million kilowatt-hours of electricity per year. This electricity requires no water and creates no air emissions, and it is affordable. Another big benefit that potential customers tell us they are interested in is the stability of a wind energy contract. We don't pay for fuel, so our price can be locked in for a long term like twenty years. Local benefits are huge: we are the largest taxpayer in Van Wert County, and local school districts are doing terrific, leading-edge things with the additional revenue. Our landowner partners enjoy the new source of revenue as they deal with a roller coaster of commodity prices and bad weather, among other challenges. Landowner payments are currently \$2.4 million annually.

Community participation has been essential to Blue Creek's success. There are over 250 families participating in the project either through wind energy lease agreements or other easement agreements. There are more neighbor agreements at Blue Creek than any other Avangrid Renewables wind farm. The project exceeded the property line and a residential setback requirement required at the time and has been operating safely with little public concern since its operation began in 2011.



I will conclude by offering some information on Blue Creek's operations. To date, the project has received 25 total complaints, one in 2016. That is over nearly five years of operating 152 turbines. Seventeen were related to television reception and those have been resolved favorably for the citizens. Five complaints have been for shadow flicker and three were for sound – all the complaints have been resolved. In fact, all three identified minor damage to the turbines that helped identify their more rapid repair. As I mentioned above, Blue Creek was permitted prior to the restrictive setbacks imposed by House Bill 483 in 2014. I believe this operational record demonstrates that commercial scale wind farms can positively coexist in Ohio's rural communities under a siting and setback regimen that allows for the economic siting of wind farms. In addition to restoring the annual renewable energy requirements in H.B. 554 I respectfully request this committee consider legislation restoring the setback language found in statute prior to 2014.

Thank you for your consideration of my testimony. I would be pleased to answer any questions at this time.