

Senate Energy and Public Utilities Committee

May 19, 2021

Proponent Testimony

Julia F. Johnson

Champaign County

Chairman McColley, Vice Chairman Schuring, Ranking Member Williams and members of the Committee. My name is Julie Johnson and I live in rural Champaign County. As you can see from our County Visitor's Bureau marketing poster below, Champaign is a county valued for its natural resources and the opportunities they provide for outdoor recreation. The Mad River which flows through the county is one of the largest cold water fisheries in Ohio. ODNR periodically stocks the river with rainbow and brown trout. Our community of river supporters and landowners constantly work in collaboration to restore and protect the river ecosystem.

When the Biden Administration announced its aggressive infrastructure plan, it included a dramatic expansion of renewables but also a commitment to "prioritize stakeholder engagement, community consultation, and maximize equity, health, and environmental benefits." In that regard, The Nature Conservancy published a map to assist in identifying low-conflict areas where the potential to generate wind power might be considered. The Nature Conservancy believes that wildlife habitat and other areas which provide ecosystem benefits should be avoided. (Attachment A)

I was struck by the map which The Nature Conservancy published when considering Ohio's extensive water resources. Ohio is virtually covered with rivers and streams. These areas provide important ecosystem benefits and the Nature Conservancy recognizes that development of utility-scale wind and solar may have an adverse impact that cannot necessarily be mitigated or avoided.

Careful land use planning is essential for the protection of our environment, biodiversity and the soils which support agriculture - one of the largest contributors to Ohio's economy. And that planning takes place in Ohio at the local level.

I was involved in the issue of policy development for siting utility-scale wind as a member of the state Development Department's Ohio Wind Working Group as far back as 2007. I was the only "stakeholder" invited to participate on behalf of the public. The developers, state agencies, the OPSB and the Farm Bureau were all at the table as voting members. At that time, the State of Ohio had engaged a consultant to work with the stakeholders on articulating best practices for siting industrial wind. The state's consultant, Sandra McKew¹, wrote to Governor Strickland's office on May 23, 2008:

¹¹ Ms. McKew was a professional land use planner with 40 years of experience in land use planning, zoning regulations, fiscal impact analysis, farmland preservation planning, and development of strategic approaches to address sustainable growth management. She was appointed by Governor Voinovich as the planning

“The problem we have right now in Ohio is that business lease developers are signing as many people as possible right out of the box and then trying to fit the eventual project into whoever signs up. This is the opposite of how projects should be designed. It was for this reason that we argued so strenuously for the predevelopment identification of wind overlay districts within the state.”

Thirteen years later, Ms. McKew’s words still ring true. With the nation’s proposed expansion of utility-scale wind and solar and inevitable future conflicts with land use priorities for farmland preservation, stewardship of natural resources, wildlife habitat and biodiversity, Sub SB 52 will provide, at last, the opportunity to make thoughtful choices at the local level through Energy Development Districts.

Only the General Assembly can enfranchise local stakeholders. No one should confuse the idea that improvement to the Ohio Power Siting Board’s *application process* is a way to address the needs of a disenfranchised public. Restoring the commitment to local land use planning and respecting those plans has nothing to do with the Ohio Power Siting Board. **These are two entirely distinct issues.** We have seen numerous misguided efforts to conflate accessible public hearings or the use of conditions placed on a certificate as a way to address local land use planning concerns. They are not the same and no elected official should be fooled by such claims.

A community’s culture, its commitment to biodiversity and protecting its natural resources is as much an economic development concern as it is an environmental concern. The current lack of local control robs communities of the ability to protect what they cherish and grants private for-profit developers a status that trumps all other local aspirations set forth in land use plans.

Sub SB 52 is a win-win for communities and developers. Developers can go where they are welcome and local land use plans will not be upended. Developers will still enjoy the stability of the OPSB process which they have repeatedly praised during these hearings.

representative on the Ohio Farmland Preservation Task Force on which she served from 1996-97 She was a member of the National Wind Coordinating Collaborative funded by the U.S. Department of Energy, and in 2007 she provided professional planning assistance to the Ohio Wind Working Group under contract with the Ohio Department of Development.

Champaign County

EXPLORE THE OUTDOORS



KISER LAKE STATE
PARK
4889 OH-235
CONOVER, OH



SIEGENTHALER-KAESTNER
ESKER STATE NATURE
PRESERVE
5505 COUCHMAN RD
WEST LIBERTY, OH



OHIO CAVERNS
2210 OH-245 E
WEST LIBERTY, OH

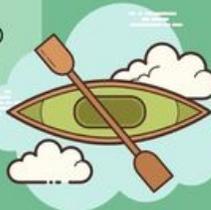
CAVE ADVENTURES LLC
3781 SLATE STONE RD
CABLE, OH



RITTENHOUSE RESORT
4739 WOODVILLE PIKE,
URBANA, OH



BIRCH BARK CANOE
LIVERY
1455 RIVER RD
URBANA, OH



DAVEY WOODS STATE
NATURE PRESERVE
7661 LONESOME ROAD
ST. PARIS, OH



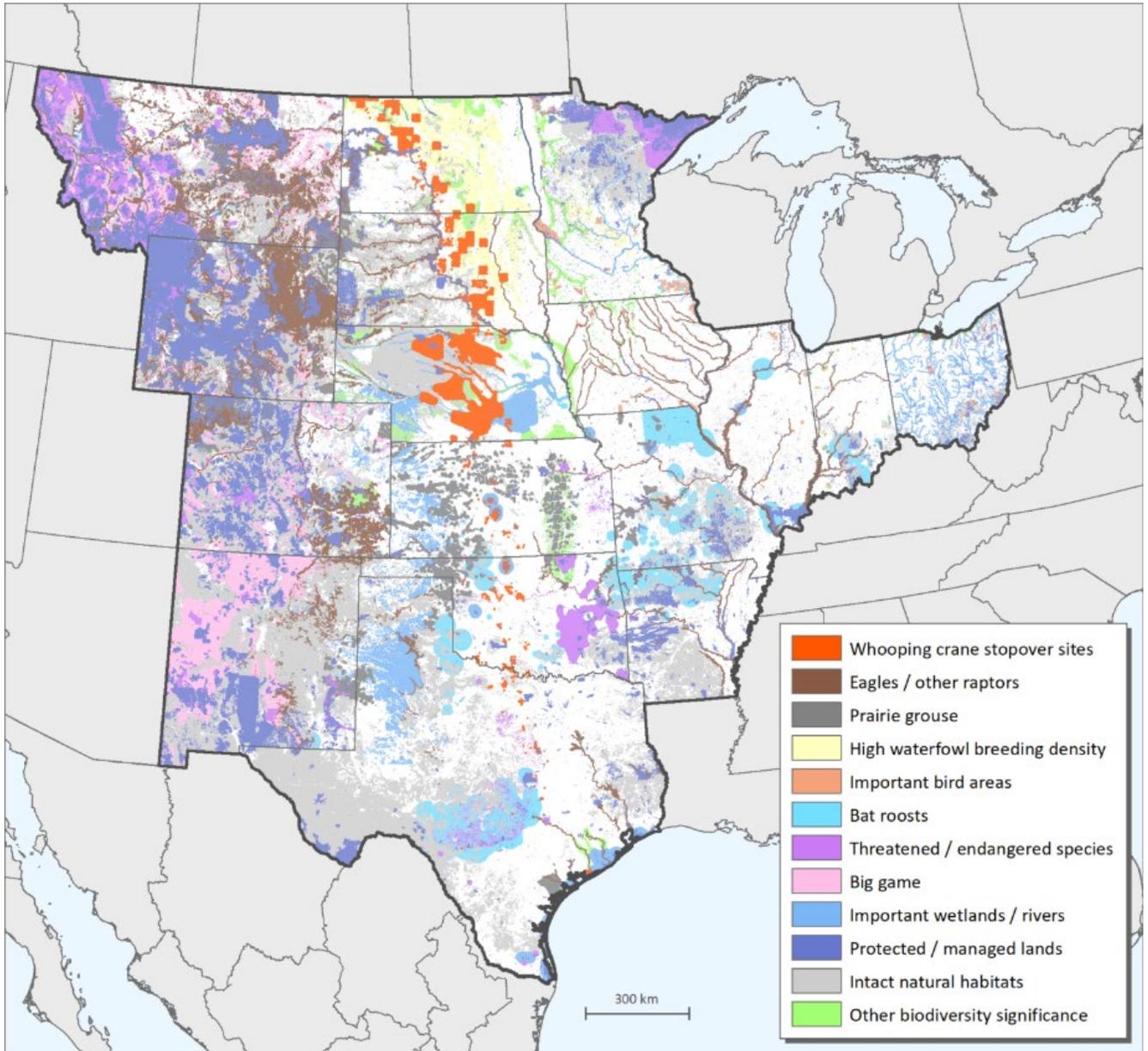
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CEDAR BOG NATURE
PRESERVE
980 WOODBURN RD
URBANA, OH



ATTACHMENT A



The wildlife layer data from The Nature Conservancy's Site Wind Right mapping analysis. Site Wind Right mapping tool reveals there are 90 million acres in the Central U.S. where wind energy development would not disrupt important wildlife habitat. These low-conflict areas have the potential to generate more than 1,000 gigawatts of wind power in the Central U.S., solely from new projects sited away from important wildlife areas.