

What you need to know about wildfires and renewable energy projects

In 2004 the County approved the Energy Overlay Zone. This ambitious plan takes 2/3 of the County's land and permits it outright for renewable energy. Beyond the EOZ many residents are finding out that neighbors have signed leases to these companies therefore your property could border these projects in the near future. The County now has over 600 wind turbines that now fill the skyline surrounding the county. It doesn't come without risks. In 2019 the Juniper fire was caused by a wind turbine. It burned nearly 500 acres. It is unclear what the cost was to the county. 16 years after the EOZ's approval, the county is now a hot spot for utility scale solar projects. This is because we have some of the most lenient ordinances in the nation. Our current ordinances barely mentions the words solar. This means that our county hasn't researched how these projects may increase wildfires. Many of the landowners will be vulnerable to these dangers. Because of this, C.E.A.S.E Citizens Educated About Solar Energy wants the community to know about these risks to your property. Large utility scale solar farms are linked to starting fires. Anytime more structures enter areas prone to wildfire the likelihood of them occurring increases. In 2019 the county approved the Lund Hill solar project. It is Washington's largest utility solar farm that encompasses nearly 5,000 acres. Because our County Commissioners have ignored our outcry to update ordinances and wildfire protection plans we have taken it upon ourselves to do our own research and educate residents. Here's what our research found:

In 2019 *LA Times* reported that a California wildfire burned 1,127 acres. It was caused by a bird landing on a solar conductor. The Fire Chief stated that "it happens all the time." With a diverse bird population and dry landscapes, Klickitat County residents should be aware of the likelihood of wildfires when more of these projects are approved. So what can we do to prepare? By exploring the the county's wildfire protection plan we can gain better insight.

Figures below are taken from the county's wildfire protection plan found [here](#)

District #7 would be the nearest department for the Knight Road area. As stated below there is no full time firefighters on staff. Additionally, the District #7 Fire Chief Anthony Browning said neither himself nor his staff has received additional training or equipment to handle emergencies at these facilities. See Figure (1):

#7) Klickitat County Rural 7 Fire and Rescue (Goldendale)

District Summary: KCFD #7 is staffed by 24 part-time firefighters. It is 272 square miles and surrounds the city of Goldendale. The primary land cover in the district is agriculture, with scrubland interspersed, as well as timber. The city of Goldendale has its own fire department.

Revised in 2018, the county has yet to update the Wildfire Protection Plan. Despite the growing interest of utility scale projects wanting to site in Klickitat County the plan does not address

solar projects. Wildfires was brought up several times to county commissioners however, they have continuously ignored our concern. What can you do? One thing that seems apparent, if residents want to protect their investments it would be essential to have a back up power supply. These are high voltage systems. In an event of fire the power will be cut off. This would eliminate a homeowners ability to run sprinklers providing moisture barriers around their property or on roof tops. In addition, homeowners should check with insurance companies to make sure they are covered for entire loss of property. See Figure (2)

- **Power/Electricity:**
 - Major power infrastructure includes transmission lines that run through the east half of the county, windmills, and sub stations and residential areas feature above-ground powerlines.
 - In the event of a wildfire, utility poles along Hwy 14 could be threatened and residents who are on wells will not be able to get water in their homes if they were to lose power.

The county has very limited resources for wildfires. There is no mention of adding to them as more facilities enter the county either. What equipment is available? Ten vehicles makes up the fleet at the Goldendale Fire Department. There is roughly more than 50 residents near the 5,000 acre block where the future solar farm is projected to be. With the largest vehicle capable of holding 3000 gallons. It is likely that we will see complete destruction of homesteads. Some have been here for a century and have done little to prepare for the additional risk that is coming. See Figure (3)

Goldendale Fire Department

District Summary: The City of Goldendale Volunteer Fire Department is a volunteer organization; it is not staffed with any full time fire fighters. The department typically maintains between 20 and 30 members but can have as many as 36 members. The Goldendale Volunteer Fire Department covers approximately 2.9 square miles.

Table 9) Available firefighting resources for Goldendale Fire Department.

Equipment Number	Year	Make	Tank Size (Gallons)	Type	Pump (GPM)	License Number	Vin Number	Other	Available for Mobilization
E 61-11	2004	HME	780	S1	1500	32118D	44KFT42845 WZ20627	Class A Foam	Yes
E 61-12	1998	Pierce	500	S1	1250	19114D	P1CT0202W A000795		Yes
61-15		FIRE STATION	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A	N/A		N/A
B 61-21	1994	GMC 3/4 Ton 4x4	275	B6	50			Class A Foam	Yes
S 61-23	1999	Ford F350		TRAUMA VERIFIED BLS AID UNIT		19190D	1FDWE30FO X4A87536		No
S 61-24	1986	Chevrolet G-30 1 Ton		BREATHING AIR SUPPORT		32157D	2GDHG3E1M 3E4530230	Set up for Rehab Cascade air supply	Yes
T 61-31	2002	TENDER	3000	T3	60				Yes
B 61-51	1969	Jeep M3521, 1 1/4 Ton 4x4	200	B6	60	1282D	35966	Class A Foam	Yes
B 61-52	2014	Ford F-450 Ext. Cab 4x4	500	B3	150	32155D	2FTJW36G3J CA09472	Class A Foam	Yes
B 61-53	1994	Chevrolet G-20 3/4 Ton 4x4	200	B6	60	19107D	1GGK263294	Class A Foam	Yes
E 61-64	1972	Seagrave	500	S1	1500	01281D	PB25068	UL Rated	No

The commissioners have shown little interest in updating outdated ordinances relating to utility scale solar projects. In the Final Environmental Impact Statement for the Lund Hill Project the Planning Department states that the company shall refer to the Wildfire Protection Plan however, there is nothing within the plan that addresses solar farms particularly. It would appear that the county's solution for adding additional risk shall be to place upon the homeowner's not the companies. One of the corporations interested siting here is worth \$62 billion dollars. Shouldn't it be a cost of doing business if you will require more from our Fire Departments and county resources? It isn't unreasonable to have large facilities have their own Fire Departments. For instance, The Hanford Nuclear Power Facility in Benton County has their own. This is common sense practices. Asking volunteers fire fighter to fight structural fires at a nuclear site is absurd. It would be deadly. Equally, asking our volunteers to enter high voltage facilities with no training and minimal equipment is also very dangerous and shouldn't be an option. Figure (4)

Fire protection may rely more on the landowner's personal initiative to take measures to protect his or her property. Furthermore, subdivisions on steep slopes and the greater number of homes exceeding 3,000 square feet are also factors challenging fire service organizations. In the future, public education and awareness may play a greater role in rural or interface areas. Great improvements in fire protection techniques are being made to adapt to large, rapidly spreading fires that threaten large numbers of homes in interface areas.

In most western states, state and federal agencies that have wildland fire protection responsibilities have launched a campaign to reiterate to the public that they do not provide structural fire protection. Much of the increasing costs of wildland fires can be directly related to the increasing number of structures in the wildland urban interface. State and federal agencies are trying to make it clear to the public that land and homeowners are responsible for reducing the fire risk on their property and that the agencies are not responsible for or required to provide structural protection.

Fire districts within Klickitat County have reported various concerns and needs in regards to staffing and equipment. Few districts feel as though they are both sufficiently staffed and have all equipment necessary to service their respective jurisdictions, particularly in scenarios where prolonged action is required. Most districts are challenged by either personnel recruitment or retention or by outdated equipment and/or equipment limitations.

Lastly, the county recognizes that energy facilities and the infrastructures related to them are “Areas of Concern” yet they fail to add solar farms to the list. This causes us to speculate that the safety concerning them has not been discussed as well. This is extremely negligent given that the county is already hosting the largest utility solar farm in the state. Since the elected officials that we pay to do this job has failed our residents; It is our hope that residents press for this important topic to become a priority. See Figure (5)

Special Areas of Concern

The following pieces of critical infrastructure have been identified as special areas of concern:

- Utility lines, including power transmission, water, phone, internet, and natural gas lines
- Goldendale Generating Station. Puget Sound Energy natural gas-fired power plant in Goldendale
- Wind power turbines and facilities
- Municipal watershed infrastructure and facilities
- Natural gas service lines and pumping stations
- Cell and 911 communication towers.
- Millions of dollars in recreational infrastructure and spending are at risk during a wildfire.
- Ranching and farming equipment, protection of fence posts and other infrastructure during a wildfire.