

Opening Statement by  
Cathy Johnson, NRCM  
On behalf of the “Consolidated Parties” – AMC, Maine Audubon and NRCM  
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Good morning. I am Cathy Johnson, Senior Staff Attorney and North Wood Project Director for the Natural Resources Council of Maine. I am speaking today on behalf of the “consolidated parties” which include the Appalachian Mountain Club, Maine Audubon and NRCM.

The consolidated parties oppose the granting of a permit for the proposed 15-turbine wind power project on Sisk Mountain. We believe this project as a whole fails to meet the necessary statutory criteria, including the criteria that “there will be no undue adverse impacts on existing uses, scenic character and natural and historic resources in the area.” Specifically we believe the project will have undue adverse impacts on:

- A rare subalpine forest, which provides breeding habitat to a species of highest conservation concern (Bicknell’s Thrush); and
- The scenic character and related uses at Chain of Ponds and other statutorily designated scenic resources.

Our opposition is focused on the adverse impacts caused by the seven southern turbines. We would support a permit for the eight northern turbines, which do not pose the same undue adverse impacts.

Our three organizations have been strongly supportive of wind power development in Maine. We were all active participants in, and supported the recommendations of, the Governors Task Force on Wind Power Development. We have all supported or remained neutral on nine of the eleven wind projects which have completed the permitting process to date in the state. This is only the third project that any of our organizations have opposed either in whole or in part during a permitting process.

We supported the rezoning and permitting for the original Kibby wind project because it would provide, and already has started to provide, significant clean energy benefits while avoiding significant adverse impacts on important natural and scenic resources.

We take climate change and the environmental impacts from our dependence on fossil fuels seriously. We believe Maine and the broader world must move swiftly and effectively to curb fossil fuel use and substitute cleaner forms of energy, including renewables.

But nothing in our understanding of the energy issues confronting us leads us to believe that Maine or the Commission must approve all wind power projects - even if they are proposed in the expedited area.

As parties involved in the process that led to the designation of the expedited area and the adoption of the wind power siting law, our groups understand very well that this designation makes wind an “allowable” use from a zoning perspective. But even projects in the expedited area very clearly require continued full scrutiny of natural resource impacts in the permitting process, with an important but narrow change only to the scenic impact standards.

The Commission will face significant pressure to approve this project, including by those in this region who benefited from the first Kibby project. However, our close involvement with both projects gives us a particularly strong understanding of the specific adverse impacts of the Sisk project as compared to the Kibby project. Although Sisk is located close to Kibby, it is a separate mountain, and the adverse impacts from the proposed seven southern turbines would be significantly different and greater than those at Kibby.

As documented in the testimony submitted by Dave Publicover, Susan Gallo and me for the consolidated parties, we have identified three specific areas in which the project — specifically the southern seven turbines — fails to pass the “no undue adverse impact test.” We encourage you to keep these three concerns in mind as you hear testimony given today.

First, the project would degrade and fragment a significant and essentially pristine example of the rare Fir-Heartleaved Birch Subalpine Forest community. The project would eliminate or indirectly degrade 30% of this particular community occurrence.

Second, the applicant significantly underestimates the adverse impact on Bicknell’s Thrush, a species that is found only in very limited areas of the northeastern U.S. and southeastern Canada, and one that has been identified as a species of highest conservation concern by state, national and international groups.

Third, the project would significantly compromise the largely undeveloped character of several scenic resources in the area, including a Public Reserve Land Unit whose management plan focuses on recreation in a highly scenic environment, and seven lakes and ponds rated “outstanding” by the Maine Wildlands Lakes Assessment.

Each of these adverse impacts can be considered individually, but together they clearly demonstrate that Sisk Mountain is an area of particularly high natural resource and scenic value that is unsuitable for development.

We hope that there may be a path forward to allow some additional wind development to occur on the northern end of the Sisk ridge and make use of existing Kibby infrastructure. But if that is not possible, and this permit must be evaluated solely as it appears today, then we believe the Commission must issue a denial based on the clear, multiple undue adverse impacts on natural and scenic resources.

Thank you.

