

February 14, 2012
House Interim Committee on Energy, Environment and Water
Testimony in regards to HB4078 – Energy Siting

Co-chairs Bailey and Gilliam, members of the committee – thank you for this opportunity to speak in regards to HB4078.

My name is Alan Hickenbottom and I'm General Manager of the Energy Services Group at Christenson Electric. We are a 66-year old, Oregon-based NECA-IBEW electrical contractor with over 300 union and non-union employees.

We want to thank the Solar Resource Advisory Group for their work in leading up to the drafting of HB4078. However, we have two specific concerns with the bill which are addressed in the dash (2) amendments before you.

The first item is the acreage. We would ask you to support the increase from 100 acres to 250 acres. As others have mentioned, as system costs continue to decrease (thanks in part from the support of policies such as an intelligently administered Business Energy Tax Credit) systems of this size are getting into the parity neighborhood. In other words, projects that pencil out without state tax credit support. 100 acres just isn't enough to provide the scale needed.

Second is the "species of concern" issue. The rules as submitted in the original draft will put a significant burden on solar developers that will basically stifle development of projects of this type –they will simply add too much time and uncertainty. As a self declared tree-hugging capitalist, I feel that the combination of the Endangered Species Act, state and county land use rules and the narrow definition of the land type that can be used for this type of development provide the right level of balanced protection. Referring to the language in the bill:

"Predominantly in capability classes VI to VIII, if the farmland has not been irrigated for crop production for more than one of the five calendar years Predominantly in capability class IV or V, if the county . . . finds that the proposed site is not reasonably capable of supporting commercial agricultural crop production for reasons including, but not limited to, poor soil quality, rocks and inability to obtain necessary irrigation water."

Finally, I wanted to give you some context around jobs. In 2011, Christenson Electric participated in systems ranging in size from 2kW to 2.88MW. In total, we put over 100 people to work on nearly 5MW of solar development producing enough clean energy to power 500 average Oregon homes. These jobs ranged in duration from a few days to up to 4 months. This number only counts Christenson Electric – it doesn't include other subcontractors or Oregon-based manufacturers such as SolarWorld and PV Powered. Nor does it count the 10-15 ongoing operation and maintenance jobs for larger systems. While 10-15 jobs doesn't seem like a lot, I think we all understand the multiplier effect of these jobs in small, rural communities.

In closing, I want to again thank the committee for their work on this issue and urge passage of the bill based on the dash (2) amendments.