

Public Comment on HB 4031

I want to speak not only as a concerned Oregonian, but as someone whose family has lived in rural Oregon for seven generations. My roots here run deeper than any transmission line or corporate investment. This is not barren land. This is not “empty space” waiting to be industrialized. This is a living, breathing rural community built by families who have worked their entire lives to pay off their farms, raise their children, and preserve a way of life that has existed for more than a century.

HB 4031 is simply a push to fast-track massive renewable energy projects without comprehensive siting oversight.

Large-scale renewable projects are growing by thousands of acres every year, and the impact on rural Oregon is devastating when siting is done irresponsibly. Most counties simply do not have the manpower, expertise, or land-use regulations to evaluate industrial-scale projects of this magnitude. Developers know this and therefore they are actively seeking ways to bypass state-level review so they can qualify for federal tax credits as quickly as possible.

But Oregon’s lands should not be for sale to developers who come here only for profit. And rural Oregonians should not be treated as collateral damage in a race for short-term tax revenue.

My family has lived on this land for generations. We have cared for it, protected it, and built our lives around it. Yet today, it feels as though the state is more focused on politics and appeasing large corporations—including AI data centers that demand enormous amounts of energy—than on protecting the people who actually live here. It feels deeply unfair that developers and massive technology companies are favored over the hardworking families who form the backbone of rural Oregon.

If irresponsible siting continues, my family will be forced to leave the area—and leave Oregon entirely. The place we have called home for seven generations would no longer be livable. That is not an exaggeration. That is the reality we are facing.

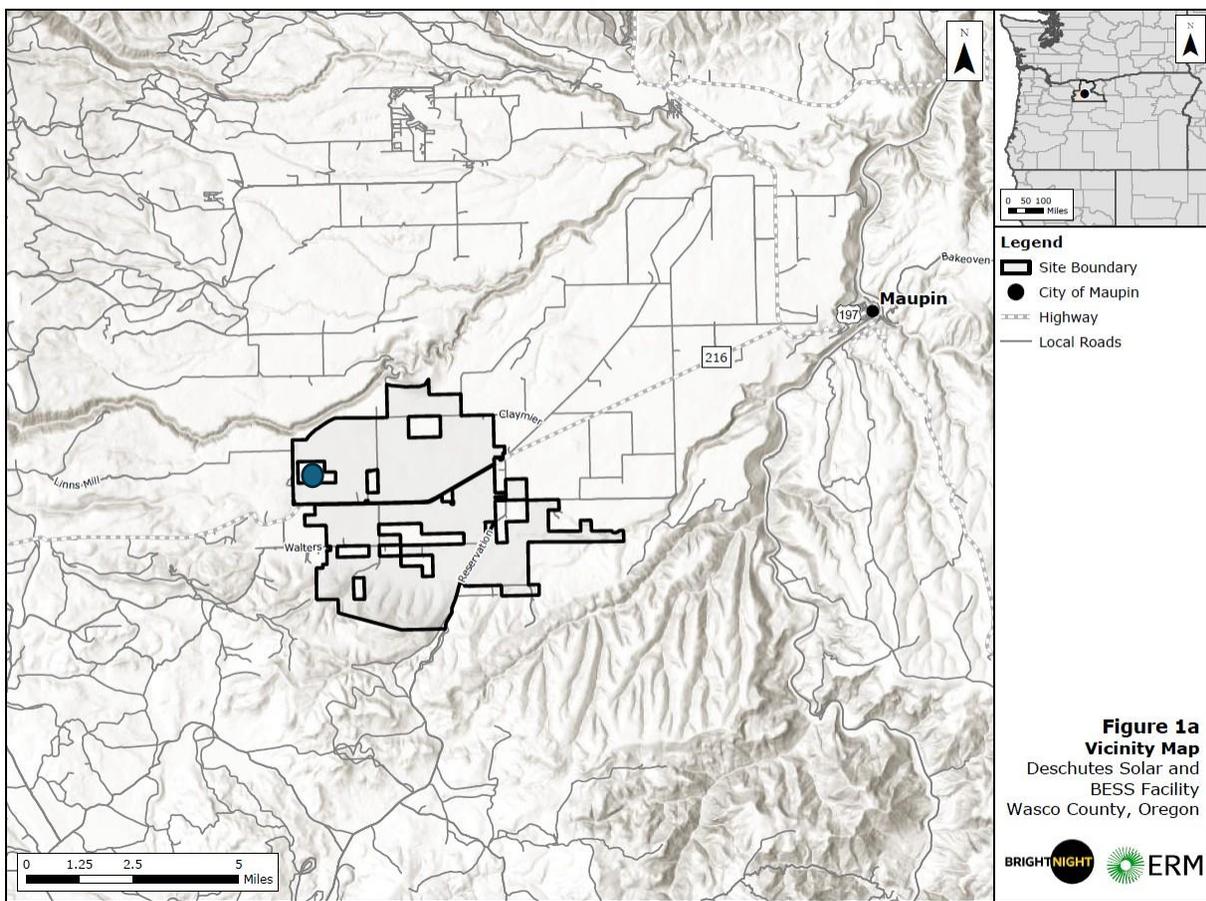
A Real Example: Deschutes River Solar + BESS Battery Storage

The Deschutes River Solar and Battery Energy Storage System is a 21 square mile proposed project in South Wasco County. If approved as proposed, this project would surround nearby homes and farms with:

- over 2,000,000 solar panels
- nearly 90 miles of 8-foot chain-link fencing

- miles and miles of electrified wiring
- around 30 shipping-container-sized lithium battery units all within a quarter-mile of people's homes
- utilize millions of gallons of water out of the Columbia River and local exempt wells.
- Sited within ¼ mile from a wild and scenic river

This project would not be 10 miles out of town next to us, it would be on top of us, surrounding my property on all four sides. In the map below the white cut outs are small farms. Mine is the one with the blue dot. Over 20 family farms and homes would be bordered or surrounded by this project that is situated on the banks of the Wild and Scenic White River and less than 8 miles from the Deschutes River.



This is exactly the kind of project that requires comprehensive statewide oversight. Counties cannot be expected to manage this alone. And rural families should not be expected to sacrifice their safety, their property, and their heritage so that corporations can meet tax-credit deadlines. These are just a few of the issues that need to be addressed.

Siting should not be permitted just because we ‘need’ energy. It should be a thoughtful endeavor to save Oregon’s lands and heritage while balancing the need for energy.

Oregon Must Not Forget Its Rural Communities

Oregon has always prided itself on thoughtful land-use planning and environmental stewardship. Kotek’s climate agenda clearly highlights building rural community resilience, protecting our waters, and our lands while. But right now, it feels as though rural communities are being forgotten—treated as expendable landscapes rather than as places where real people live, work, and raise their families.

HB 4031 must not move forward without strong guardrails that ensure:

- comprehensive statewide review
- cumulative-impact analysis
- public safety protections
- meaningful community involvement
- and safeguards for Oregon’s rural families and landscapes

Oregon lawmakers MUST DO BETTER!

Thank you for taking your time to truly consider the impacts of such legislation.

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