

OPPOSITION TO HB 4031

I am writing to express my strong opposition to HB 4031. I have serious reservations about expediting the siting and permitting process for renewable energy projects. The current Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) process exists to ensure thorough evaluation of environmental impacts, wildfire risks, water availability, and other critical public safety concerns. It also provides meaningful opportunities for community involvement and public comment.

HB 4031 appears to remove community members from this important process and instead places siting decisions in the hands of a small number of county officials who may not have the staffing, expertise, or resources necessary to manage large-scale industrial developments. Developers are fully aware that many small counties are not equipped to oversee projects of this magnitude and are seeking to fast-track approval processes, particularly as federal tax credits approach expiration.

I grew up on Juniper Flat in Wasco County. My family's farm has been in our family for over 100 years. Today, a large-scale solar developer is proposing a 14,000+ acre industrial project in our community—on Exclusive Farm Use (EFU) land. This is a place where generations of families have lived, farmed, and raised their children. These are lifelong neighbors—people I attended school with, participated in 4-H activities with at the county fair, and spent childhood summers alongside in our local creek.

This proposed development would surround many homes on three or even four sides. A 30-acre Battery Energy Storage System (BESS) is planned adjacent to residences in an area already classified as high fire risk. In 2022, our community was severely impacted by wildfire. If siting requirements are expedited, what guarantees will we have regarding fire prevention and response? What assurances exist regarding water usage? Large-scale solar projects require millions of gallons of water for construction and ongoing operations. Our region already faces water constraints. Will local wells run dry?

Communities are the fabric of society. They are families who may now face increased fire risk, water shortages, excessive industrial noise, altered landscapes, potential flooding issues, declining property values, and reduced school enrollment. Industrial sites do not belong in residential farming communities—especially not on prime irrigated farmland.

The looming expiration of federal tax credits should not justify bypassing careful review. Rushed permitting risks sacrificing critical environmental and safety protections. Public safety must remain a priority. If siting processes are accelerated, where is the oversight? Who ensures compliance with permitting requirements? Many eastern Oregon counties, including South Wasco County, are facing multiple proposed solar and BESS projects simultaneously. How can a small county realistically manage oversight of several large industrial facilities?

Communities are being asked to assume significant risks with little demonstrated benefit. Claims of increased tax revenue and job creation remain vague and unsubstantiated. In fact, Avangrid, a solar developer operating in south Wasco County, is currently appealing its tax assessments after receiving years of tax benefits. Promised financial gains are neither guaranteed nor permanent.

Once farmland is converted to industrial use, it is rarely restored. When land passes into the hands of large corporations, local control and long-term community benefit are diminished. The character and sustainability of rural communities are permanently altered.

I respectfully urge you to **vote NO on HB 4031**. Our communities deserve thoughtful, transparent, and comprehensive review processes—not expedited approvals that place families, farmland, and public safety at risk.

Photos of the August, 2022 Dodge Miller Road Fire that severely impacted our farm:



Sincerely,
Michelle Van Eynde