

"The noise was incredible."
Paula Stahl, April 4, 2004

[This is a letter written by Paula Stahl of St. George, West Virginia, about her experiences living in the neighborhood of the 66 MW Mountaineer Wind Energy Center. Formerly known as the Backbone Mountain Wind Farm, the 4,400-acre site has 44 turbines, 1.5 MW each, stretched along miles of ridgeline in Tucker and Preston counties. Ms. Stahl submitted the letter to the Berkshire Eagle and North Adams Transcript, neither of which has printed it.]

I live in rural West Virginia, far and away from technology and the modern rat race of life. And that is how I like it. That is why I live here. I am of Native American descent, and chose this way of life and my location carefully, as did many other people who live in the area. Several years ago, large trucks carrying large pieces of something started showing up. Before long, several Wind Turbines were erected on the top ridge of the Mountain. ("The mountain" is what the local folks call Backbone Mountain Ridge, here in Tucker County.)

More and more trucks came and, in time, the whole ridge of the mountain skyline was lined with Wind Turbines. A wide path of timber was cut to make room for them, and the debris from this was just tossed over the hill, leaving large piles of brush, and the workers' trash underneath.

I did not know much about wind turbines, and so, I reserved my judgment. At first I learned that the community and the county were all for them, and excited about the arrival, for they said that there would be financial gains, and jobs created in the area from the project.

I walked on my normal walk in the woods one day, and looked up to the top of the mountain. Just several months before it had been a picturesque view of wilderness beauty...the kind that attracts tourists, and creates much of the state's income. Now, it was lined with these tall mechanical monsters, towering over the trees of an old forest. I am not talking about the quaint and charming windmills of Holland here, we are talking about metal, and flashing lights, and a size that miniaturizes the grand forest beneath it.

I remember that day, for I stood there, and felt just as my ancestors must have felt when they watched the railroad coming across the country into their land, and into their life...and there was nothing, absolutely nothing they could do to stop it once it began. I had a gut feeling. Instinct reaction. My mind whispered..."they are coming".

Still, I tried to keep an open mind, and learn more. Perhaps, if they are environmentally safe...if they provide jobs, and revenue...perhaps for the good of all they are worth the eye sore. So, I took a walk up the mountain, the four miles they are from my home in the little valley below, and stood beneath the machines.

The noise was incredible. It surprised me. It sounded like airplanes or helicopters. And it traveled. Sometimes you could not hear the sound standing right under one, but you heard it 3,000 yards down the hill, where the wind carried the sound. My good friend, who lives right near them, says she can hear them with the doors to her house closed sometimes.

I looked around me, to a place where months before had been prime country for deer, wild turkey, and yes, black bear, to see positively no sign of any of the animals about at all. This alarmed me, so I scouted in the woods that afternoon. I am accustomed to these woods, and know them and the signs of animals well. All afternoon, I found no sign, sight, or peek of any animal about.

I did notice, in the next few months, that the animals were more abundant down here in the valley, in the farmers' fields and such. Places that they had steered away from before, they now were in, and causing trouble for man, and, in turn, getting shot. I saw more bear and bob cats in the populated areas than I had ever seen. I went up to the windmills several times to check, and it seemed that the animals had moved away from that area. There were no sight of them, no prints, no sign.

I also noticed more flooding in the valley below. Each and every rain storm seems to make the creeks rise out of their banks, and cause damage to fields, and roads, and all the things we humans depend upon. I have tried to inquire as to any studies being done on the effects of water runoff from disturbing the top of the mountain to this degree, and the erosion, and impact of leaving the timber lay, but I am answered with blank stares, and minds that have already decided that the Wind Turbine Project is good, and will stay.

In fact, I am seen as a trouble maker, a tree hugger, and a "granola" for being concerned. It seems as if one is not really allowed to ask questions, once the monsters start their invasion.

All the while, I look up to the top of the hills my Father, Grandfather, and Great Great Grandfather called home...and watch more monsters come.

The value of property here is directly related to it being a scenic area. This is not the scenery I would travel to go see if I were a tourist. Are we cutting out our state's main revenue of tourism to try to gain a little revenue from the monsters?

Will it work? Is there a true gain in jobs? In revenue? Is it environmentally safe?