



Preserving our past

Protecting our future

Board of Directors

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October 17, 2012

Mr. Richard K. Sullivan,
Secretary, EOEAA
100 Cambridge Street, Suite #900
Boston, Ma. 02114-2119

Dear Mr. Sullivan:

The board of Pascommuck Conservation Trust in Easthampton wishes to express its concern regarding the installation of a 190 ft. lattice tower on the Mt. Tom range ridgeline. We also hope that earlier plans for adding up to five (5) wind turbines there are being abandoned, especially in light of the fact that the FAA has deemed this project to be a hazard to aviation. Consequently, we feel the Patrick Administration is missing the bigger picture here, and should re-examine this issue thoroughly. Although the Trust supports alternative energy wholeheartedly, it also recognizes the importance of choosing these sites carefully. Some locations may be suitable for these projects, but nevertheless may be even more valuable when left in their natural state, for a number of solid reasons.

Various "letters to the editor" and newspaper articles have been written about this matter with the vast majority favoring saving this special mountain range as a continuous park, as opposed to developing it into a mecca for more communication towers and questionable wind power devices. Incidentally, the state has known for a long time that Mt. Tom is biologically more important than Brushy Mountain, despite the size of the latter. This geological/ecological gem has always been a visual anchor point for our city and the surrounding Connecticut River Valley, and its image is imprinted upon Easthampton's town seal. Historically, it is rich in Native American lore, had a close connection to the popular Mt. Park when it was in operation years ago, and was host to various renowned summit houses. Mt. Tom is a diverse, key habitat for rare species and remains a vital migratory route for birds and bats. It's recreational, tourist attracting, scenic attributes beckon legions of hikers, birders, photographers, nature enthusiasts and hang glider operators from near and far.

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Granted, that Holyoke insists that wind energy experts, including hired consultants, have concluded that the site has wind energy potential. Recent independent studies deem this area as having only marginal wind capacity. Note also, that the National Center for Atmospheric Research in Boulder, Colorado states that we have a long way to go in understanding wind flow, especially those complex currents over hills and mountains. Yes, if turbines were installed on the mountain, Holyoke might gain a marginal amount of alternative energy, but Easthampton and the valley west of the range would inherit a view of metallic monstrosities and a strong dose of annoying noise pollution.

Wind turbines and tall communication towers at the site pose a threat to migratory species relying on this mountain ridge. Strong, uplifting currents there are more reliable than erratic horizontal air patterns, making this location more conducive to migration and hang gliding than turbine power. Visitors to this nationally recognized scenic ridgeline are lured by Mt. Tom's natural, breath-taking vistas, not by a conglomeration of towers cluttering the landscape.

Sensitive habitat and rare species will be, and already have been, disrupted. Removing and shipping out disrupted species elsewhere for breeding and later re-introduction doesn't quite cut it – far better to use common sense and avoid abusing fragile environments in the first place.

The deadline for obtaining wind power permits had long passed. We advocate that the State DCR, along with the MTC, act on their option to purchase the land above the present state reservation. Furthermore, we advocate that the University of Massachusetts be urged to dismantle their abandoned wind turbine, and that Holyoke remove their experimental lattice tower as well.

In the past, the state has spent a substantial amount of funds to preserve the habitat on the range and enhance its recreational features. Let's not lose the momentum and opportunity to do even more now and in the future. A valuable resource such as Mt. Tom deserves to remain in the public domain as an unimpaired entity, undivided and uninterrupted by special interests.

Sincerely,



John R. Bator, President
For the Board of Pascommuck Conservation Trust, Inc.

JRB:shs

cc: Stephanie Cooper, Asst. Secretary,
For Land & Forest Conservation.