



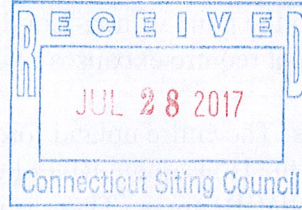
Housatonic Valley Association

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Litchfield Hills Greenprint
Collaborative

7/26/2017

ORIGINAL

PUBLIC COMMENT

Petition No. 1312 – Candlewood Solar, LLC

Melanie A. Bachman, Executive Director
Connecticut Siting Council
Ten Franklin Square
New Britain, Connecticut 06051

Dear Ms. Bachman;

The Housatonic Valley Association is grateful for the opportunity to offer Public Comment on Petition No. 1312 – Candlewood Solar, LLC. We strongly object to the Petitioner’s representation that no Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need is required for its proposed 20 megawatt AC (26.5 megawatt DC) solar photovoltaic electrical generating facility at 197 Candlewood Mountain Road in New Milford, Connecticut.

This property has significant environmental values, including a large block of intact, unfragmented forest and additional factors that would be adversely affected by the extensive clear cut required to construct this facility. We believe it would be prudent and appropriate for the Siting Council to take the time to request and review a thorough assessment of environmental compatibility that properly delineates and describes these valuable natural resources.

The Housatonic Valley Association is a regional watershed nonprofit organization and accredited land trust serving the entire Housatonic Watershed including New Milford and 54 other Connecticut towns and cities. Our 2,750 members care deeply about the environmental health of their communities and the lands and waters on which all life depends. While we believe alternative energy sources have an important part to play in offsetting some of the negative environmental impacts of fossil fuels used for electrical generation, we are keenly aware that site-specific considerations make some places more suitable than others for protecting local and regional environmental values and renewable energy generation.

The Candlewood Mountain project site is one such place where environmental considerations must be considered in light of the scale of the facility and the environmental degradation and destruction that its large footprint and industrial infrastructure portend. These include, but are likely not limited, to the following environmental impacts:

Extensive Forest Clearing and Core Forest Fragmentation: *Senate Bill No. 943, Public Act No. 17-218* specifically identifies impacts to Core Forest as a factor which the DEEP Commissioner will consider for installations such as the Petitioner proposes. The current scale

of the Petitioner's proposed 68 acre clear cut – an increase over its initial 56 acre size – would devastate a 458 acre area of core forest habitat that runs between Pine Mountain and Candlewood Mountain and is clearly identified both by UCONN CLEAR and HVA's independent analysis of this habitat type in Connecticut. Forest fragmentation at this scale could degrade this habitat to the point of non-viability for vulnerable interior nesting bird species and many other animals that require expanses of deep forest cover.

NDDDB Area Impacts: The entire upland forest and the areas downslope through which this project area drains to the Housatonic River lie within one or more CT DEEP designated Natural Diversity Database (NDDDB) areas. There is no way for the petitioner to demonstrate that its proposal does not impact these rare species and critical habitat types without a comprehensive environmental impact assessment that includes an evaluation of the vulnerabilities of these state listed rare species and priority habitats. Our conservation partner Weantinoge heritage Land Trust is aware of at least one vernal pool within the affected area.

Surface Water Quality Degradation: An upland clear cut and industrial development of this size and scale as the potential to seriously affect water quality. Some of the property drains into Candlewood Lake, with other sections descend steeply via Rocky River directly into the Housatonic River. Clearing 68 acres of forest land (and fragmenting it further with utility and transmission infrastructure will impair its ability absorb and filter groundwater. Swales and spreaders may redirect surface water but are a poor substitute for the ecosystem services provided by the standing forest.

Incompatibility with Public Policy: *Senate Bill No. 943, Public Act No. 17-218*, effective since July 1, 2017, should be considered by the Siting Council when evaluating the Petitioner's request. In addition to its clear material impacts on core forest, an industrial development of this size and complexity at this location runs counter to the OPM 2013-2018 Conservation and Development Policies Plan in which this project area is depicted as a Conservation Area with 1-3 factors. Neither would this project be approved under the Town of New Milford's Planning and Zoning Regulations.

Because this proposal would dramatically degrade or destroy a significant area of core forest, the Siting Council is well within its right to determine that it represents a "substantial adverse environmental effect" under *Public Act No. 17-218*. We urge you to reject Candlewood Solar's petition for a declaratory ruling that no Certificate of Environmental Compatibility and Public Need is required and insist on a full review of the environmental impacts of this proposal, in keeping with the intent of the State legislature when it passed P.A. 17-218 on July 1st.

Thank you for your consideration.



Timothy Abbott
Regional Land Protection and Greenprint Director

CC: Lynn Werner, Executive Director, HVA
TA/lw