August 28, 2024

Skagit County Commissioners Oppose Goldeneye BESS Project

The Board of Skagit County Commissioners has issued the following statement regarding the Goldeneye battery energy storage system project (BESS) east of Sedro-Woolley.

“After careful consideration of the application materials provided by Goldfinch Energy Storage and comments from the community, we must oppose the Goldeneye BESS project, proposed at a location in unincorporated Skagit County just east of Sedro-Woolley. The energy storage system threatens decades of collaborative local-tribal work and many millions of public dollars spent to restore Hansen Creek, home to four species of Pacific salmon, steelhead trout, and other wildlife. The Goldeneye BESS proposal would also convert Skagit farmland for industrial development, undermining our community’s long-term protection of Skagit Valley’s farmland and farming economy. Goldfinch Energy Storage has failed to adequately explore alternative sites for this project, instead proposing a location in a sensitive natural resource area for both agriculture and salmon, including Endangered Species Act-listed chinook. We strongly encourage the Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council to reject this proposal. It is contrary to Skagit County’s Comprehensive Plan, adopted County code, and our community’s intergenerational commitment to protect the Skagit’s floodplain for farming and fisheries.”

The Board of Skagit County Commissioners will continue to advocate on our community’s behalf as the Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) and the Governor consider the Goldeneye BESS project.

In addition, the Board of County Commissioners will be evaluating whether major utility developments should be sited on Skagit farmland in general. Currently, Skagit County Code requires major utility developments on farmland (properties zoned Ag-NRL) obtain a Hearing Examiner Special Use Permit, which involves an open record hearing after significant public notice. The Hearing Examiner Special Use Permit also requires the applicant conduct a vigorous alternative site analysis to ensure no project site other than Skagit farmland would be suitable.

Background on the Goldfinch Energy Storage Proposal

Goldfinch Energy Storage has applied to the Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) to develop a battery energy storage system (BESS) project in unincorporated Skagit County just east of Sedro-Woolley on Minkler Road. The project involves land on both sides of Hansen Creek, as well as a plan to tunnel under the creek.
The Goldeneye BESS project would consist of energy storage buildings containing racks of lithium-ion batteries and other electrical and communication equipment. The project site parcels are zoned Agriculture-Natural Resource Lands (Ag-NRL) and Rural Reserve (RRv).

The EFSEC process supersedes Skagit County’s authority to evaluate projects based on the County’s land use, environmental, and development regulations. EFSEC will make a

recommendation to the Governor. The Governor makes the final decision.

In early 2023, Goldfinch Energy Storage requested Skagit County Planning & Development Services issue an administrative official interpretation (AOI), determining whether the proposed Goldeneye BESS project would be defined as a “major utility development” or “major regional utility development.” AOI 2023-01 was issued on February 1, 2023, and declared the proposed project to be a “major utility development” because it was determined the project lacked regionality as the energy stored would ostensibly only be used to supplement power grid needs within Skagit County, the project is of relatively small scale, and the project would not have large impacts compared to other major regional utility developments. Since then, Goldfinch Energy Storage has used AOI 2023-01 to argue the proposed Goldeneye project is allegedly consistent with Skagit County land use regulation.

In considering the AOI, Skagit County Planning & Development Services staff did not evaluate whether the proposed project was consistent with Skagit County land use regulation. The Board of County Commissioners does not believe the proposed Goldeneye project is consistent with Skagit County’s land use code, plans and regulations and AOI 2023-01 does not constitute Skagit County’s consent or approval of the Goldeneye project.

To find more information on the application by Goldfinch Energy Storage to EFSEC, or to sign up for project updates, please visit the EFSEC website.