



UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE
The Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere
Washington, D.C. 20230

The Honorable Deb Fischer
United States Senate
Washington, DC 20515-2708

JAN - 5 2015

Dear Senator Fischer:

Thank you for your letter sharing your constituents' concerns regarding the potential impacts of NextEra's proposed Cottonwood Wind Project on the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's (NOAA) Doppler weather radar near Blue Hill, Nebraska.

Last summer, NOAA's Radar Operations Center (ROC) evaluated the project for potential impacts. The ROC began working with NextEra representatives in August 2014 to develop a mitigation strategy. On November 24, 2014, NextEra and the local Weather Forecast Office (WFO) in Hastings, Nebraska, signed a Letter of Intent (voluntary agreement) to curtail wind farm operations at the discretion of local forecasters during certain severe weather scenarios. Curtailing turbine operation, which stops the rotation of the turbine blades, eliminates interference to NOAA's weather radar. NextEra and NOAA intend to make a public announcement by the end of January 2015 now that the agreement is in place. NextEra has also agreed to have its full-time wind farm operators trained by the WFO to be storm spotters. In addition, we are working with NextEra to implement a data sharing agreement in which NextEra provides supplemental weather observations from the Cottonwood Project to the WFO for forecast operations.

NOAA, through the WFO, began an outreach program to the local community in September 2014. We provided information on impacts to radar data and potential mitigation strategies to the media, emergency managers, and the public through webinars, conference calls, interviews, and attendance at public forums. The WFO will continue outreach efforts prior to the start of the severe weather season this spring.

NOAA's forecasters, including those in the Midwest, have been very successful in mitigating wind farm interference of radar data during severe weather operations since 2008. While we are concerned with any interference on our radars, we believe the mitigation strategy and forecaster training will reduce impacts and ensure that the Cottonwood project is not a threat to the integrity of NOAA's forecast and warning operations.

NOAA will continue to work closely with the wind energy industry to ensure that NOAA is able to deliver its mission of timely and accurate weather forecasts and warnings that protect lives and property. I appreciate your interest in this matter.

If you have any questions, please contact Amanda Hallberg Greenwell, Director of NOAA's Office of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, at (202) 482-4981.

Sincerely,

Kathryn D. Sullivan, Ph.D.
Under Secretary of Commerce
for Oceans and Atmosphere

