

# STAFF SUMMARY For BOCC MEETING PRESENTATION

**Date of Presentation:** January 17, 2018

**Staff Lead:** Sean O'Hearn, County Engineer

**Effected Departments and Offices Effected:** BOCC / Department of Public Works

**Topic:** Rush Creek Windfarm

**1. Purpose:** To update the BOCC on the Rush Creek Windfarm that's currently under construction in eastern Elbert County.

**2. Background:** The Rush Creek Windfarm is a 2-phase project that was entitled in 2016 and began construction in spring 2017.

The first phase, identified as the "Generation Phase" is located on approximately 72,000 acres and consists of the following:

- 190 wind turbine generators and towers on private property in Elbert County (there are an additional 110 wind towers and appurtenant structures located in Lincoln, Kit Carson and Cheyenne Counties)
- Below and aboveground collection and transmission lines
- Operations and Maintenance Facility
- Miles of roads accessing the wind towers from County Roads
- 4 meteorological towers.

The second phase, identified as the "Transmission Phase" is located on approximately 875 acres and consists of the following:

- 44.2 miles of 345 kV transmission lines located within a 150' wide easement
- 600 MW Electric Substation.

Mortenson Construction is the primary contractor for the generation phase. Construction of both phases is expected to be completed in October (Generation) and December (Transmission) 2018.

**3. Construction Progress to Date:** Construction activities associated with generation phase of the project generally include: wind tower access road construction; wind tower foundation construction; installation of above and below grade transmission lines; O&M building and electric substation site preparation; wind turbine tower and generator erection; O&M building construction. To date, all access roads, foundations and transmission lines have been constructed/installed and tower erection has started. Construction of the O&M building is scheduled to begin in Spring 2018.

Construction activities associated with transmission phase of the project generally include: clearing of the 150' wide easement; installation of the transmission line support structures; stringing the transmission line and construction of the electric substation. To date the easement has been cleared and the support structures are being installed. Construction of the electric substation is scheduled to begin in Spring 2018.

#### **4. Key Points:**

- a. Sales tax paid by Xcel to Elbert County to date includes \$4,276,622 and \$499,579 for the generation and transmission phase, respectively.
- b. Combined, both phases of the Rush Creek project utilize approximately 117 miles of County Roads, all of which are gravel.
- c. There are two Elbert County Road Use Agreements (RUA's) in place with bonded amounts of \$3,610,000 (generation) and \$855,000 (transmission). These agreements will remain in place until Elbert County determines that the physical condition of the affected roads are in the same or better condition compared to prior to construction conditions.
- d. In addition to the RUA's, Elbert County and Xcel have the following project related agreements in place:
  - Financial Assurance and Decommissioning
  - Transmission Development Agreement

- Tree Mitigation.

## **5. Impact on County:**

**a. Infrastructure:** As part of the Road Use Agreements, project contractors are responsible for regular maintenance of all roads included in the Agreement. Elbert County Road & Bridge resources typically allocated to the affected 117 miles of County Roads has been reallocated. Accordingly, the project hasn't caused a negative impact on available County resources. The Elbert County engineer and DPW staff inspect the affected roads and report deficiencies to the project contractor. To date the contractor response to reported deficiencies has been good.

**b. Local Residents:** Certain County Roads appeared to have been impacted more than what may have been anticipated during the project entitlement process. A road mitigation plan was developed over the first 6 months of the project that ultimately proved to effectively identify and mitigate issues in a manner that reduced impact to public health and safety. Some local residents were frustrated at first with the volume of traffic, hours of project operation and general nuisance conditions such as dust and noise generation. Elbert County representatives met with local residents that wanted to discuss the project. Concerns were identified and presented to Xcel and Mortenson. Xcel and Mortenson attempted to address concerns upon developing a mitigation plan.

**6. Going Forward Plan:** The Rush Creek project is a complex project that's progressing well in Elbert County. Elbert County DPW and Engineering will continue to inspect and monitor the project and affected County infrastructure. We anticipate that the Rush Creek project will be completed within the established schedule.

For future windfarm projects in Elbert County, it's recommended that the likely impacts during construction are better explained by applicants during the entitlement process. This will help establish local resident expectations and better quantify impacts to Elbert County infrastructure.

**7. BOCC Action Required:** None

**8. Point of Contact:** Sean O'Hearn, PE, PG, County Engineer