

July 24, 2023

Joenne McGerr, Diane Butorac, Brenden McFarland  
Washington Department of Ecology  
P.O. Box 47600  
Olympia, WA 98504-7600

Michael Furze, Glenn Blackmon, Brian Young, Nora Hawkins, Aaron Peterson, Dan Siemann  
Washington Department of Commerce  
1011 Plum Street SE  
P.O. Box 42525  
Olympia, WA 98504-2525

**RE: Draft 2025 Session Legislative Recommendations from WA Clean Energy Siting Council**

Dear Clean Energy Siting Council Co-chairs:

Our collective organizations are keenly interested in the efficient, effective and equitable siting and permitting of clean energy projects. We are proactively engaged in the state's legislative and regulatory efforts to create pathways to import and generate the clean energy necessary to meet future energy needs.

In order to address climate change and protect communities from the worst of its impacts, drawdown greenhouse gases, and meet state greenhouse gas (GHG) pollution and Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) mandates, Washington needs a clean electrical grid with the generation, transmission, and storage capacity to power a decarbonized economy.

We appreciate that the vision set out in the Clean Energy Siting Council's (CESC's) legislative recommendations, if implemented, chart a path for Washington to accelerate the deployment of clean energy generation, transmission, and storage at the pace and scale required to meet CETA mandates while also preserving the integrity of environmental laws, upholding Tribal sovereignty, and supporting the future of agriculture.

We are grateful that the CESC is taking a proactive approach to clean energy siting policy that addresses the needs of the grid, Tribes, local communities, conservation, agriculture, and developers. **As you finalize the 2025 Session Legislative Recommendations, we ask that you include recommendations to address transmission needs to meet CETA goals.**

To support the Legislature in prioritizing these recommendations, we recommend including a prioritized list we recommend the final recommendations **include a prioritized list for legislative action in the 2025 session** and distinguish between recommendations for the legislature versus agency action. The prioritized list should include legislation addressing Clean Energy Preferred Zones (CEPZ) and a Build Ready Clean Energy Program (BRCEP) as well as

funding needs (including for workgroups identified in other recommendations, agrivoltaics and multi/dual use generation, and Tribal-led siting).

Please see more specific feedback on particular draft 2025 Session Legislative Recommendations below.

**Funding Needs** – Engagement by Tribes, stakeholders, and agencies is critical to the success of the full scope of recommendations, and we support adding more detail to this recommendation to make it more actionable to the legislature.

**Planning Statewide Clean Energy Development** - This section has many recommendations that will drive well-planned clean energy projects. We support all the recommendations here, with the following comments:

- Specifically, we applaud the recommendation for both Clean Energy Preferred Zones (CEPZ) and a Build Ready Clean Energy Program (BRCEP) that will encourage early and upfront engagement, and enable development in priority, low-conflict areas and sites. We encourage the CESC to ensure the final recommendations include a more detailed proposal for BRCEP that fully incorporates tribal engagement and Community Benefits Agreements.
- We encourage the CESC to ensure that the Battery Energy Storage Systems (BESS) workgroup recommendation aligns with local government needs. We also urge the CESC to emphasize the importance of BESS to make the grid more reliable, affordable, and clean, while at the same time reducing land use impacts on local communities by lowering the overall need for wind and solar generation.
- Please clarify the recommendation to integrate clean energy development into local government planning and zoning to clearly allow for multi- and dual-uses that include clean energy.
- We would like to see the CESC continue to promote useful tools such as WSU's Least Conflict Solar Siting and TNC's Power of Place to better direct potential solar development sites to areas of the least conflict with priority habitats and species, important farmland, and cultural resource concerns.

**Make clean energy siting more beneficial for communities** – this is an important topic, and an area where local governments are doing significant work. We encourage the CESC to work in coordination with existing efforts.

- Washington State Association of Counties (WSAC) is leading a stakeholder effort with counties to address tax policy concerns for local governments. State efforts should attempt to work with and build from WSAC's efforts as long as they are working towards pathways to build clean energy.

**Tribal Engagement and Consultation** – We believe this recommendation is important to uplift because a) Tribal consultation is the law, b) it is critical to upholding the inherent sovereignty of

Tribal Nations, and c) the state must improve Tribal engagement and consultation to meet CETA goals.

- Funding work in the R-STEP proposal led by Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians is a strong recommendation and dovetails with the CESC's first recommendation for increased funding. The R-STEP proposal is limited to \$2 million over three years, which is insufficient for the full scope of work needed to meet the goals of the proposal. We urge the CESC to recommend supplementary funding if the R-STEP grant is awarded and replacement funding if the R-STEP grant is not awarded to ATNI.

**Permitting Improvements** – We recommend clarifying if there are specific permitting recommendations related to improving the EFSEC process to enhance tribal, community, conservation, and stakeholder engagement that require action by the Legislature, in addition to the pre-planning meetings and mitigation guidance that can be implemented directly through agency action. The CESC should also consider, and include where appropriate, the proposals to increase the efficiency of the permit process in the Independent Siting and Permitting Reform Report commissioned under RCW 43.394.020(3)(a).

We know that the necessary buildout is orders of magnitude more solar, wind, and other renewable generation than currently exists in the state in order to electrify buildings, transportation, and industry, and decarbonize the grid. The Clean Energy Transition Institute's Net-Zero Northwest project has forecasted Washington requires 10 GW of onshore wind (3 GW currently built) and 15 GW of utility scale solar (less than 1 GW currently built) by 2050, as well as a significant increase in transmission capacity.<sup>1</sup> We are at an exciting moment to shape the path forward for clean energy deployment in a way that aligns with Tribal treaty rights and sovereignty, while conserving sensitive natural areas and working lands and maximizing community and economic benefits. Through the above recommendations, we urge you to seize this opportunity.

Thank you for your dedication to achieving these goals through strong recommendations to the legislature.

Sincerely,

The Nature Conservancy in Washington  
Audubon Washington  
American Farmland Trust  
Conservation Northwest  
Climate Solutions

---

<sup>1</sup> [Electricity - Net-Zero Northwest | https://nznw.webflow.io/energy/electricity](https://nznw.webflow.io/energy/electricity)