



August, 15, 2025

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**RE: Clean Energy Siting Council 2025 Draft Legislative Report Recommendations –
Feedback Request**

Dear Members of the Clean Energy Siting Council,

Thank you for the opportunity to provide feedback on the Interagency Clean Energy Siting Coordinating Council's (CESC) 2025 annual legislative report draft recommendation ideas. Conservation Northwest (CNW) appreciates being able to engage with the council in recent years and continues to support responsible renewable energy planning and permitting. As advocates for conservation and sustainable development, CNW recognizes the urgent need to transition to clean energy while ensuring the protection and preservation of local natural, cultural, and agricultural resources.

Furthering Unenacted Initiatives

With robust recommendations and strong priorities amidst limited resources, it is essential to tackle both past and future needs identified for advancing clean energy implementation.

To ensure the successful transition to renewable energy resources, it is crucial to prioritize, revisit, and uplift the unenacted recommendations from 2024. The establishment of Clean Energy Preferred Zones (CEPZs), researching agrivoltaics or dual-use opportunities, developing tax policy, build-ready initiatives, and Community Benefit Plans protect and provide equitable benefits for local communities and are necessary to the future of clean energy in Washington. By continuing to address these early priorities, environmental and cultural impacts can be minimized while maximizing host community and stakeholder engagement, ultimately fostering a more effective and inclusive renewable energy landscape. Pushing forward these recommendations into 2025 will encourage consistent collaboration, protect impacted communities, integrate county

agricultural land use and production needs, and support renewable energy production through more effective project planning practices and permitting process. These 2024 recommendations all provide a strategic and necessary framework for sustainable energy development.

Empowering Tribal Governments and Local Governments

Tribal government, local government, and their communities are essential stakeholders in the renewable energy development process. Providing necessary resources and tools to stakeholders is vital for proper consultation and project review. The recent advancement of clean energy technologies requires updated codes and regulations that allow governments to learn about and consult on clean energy projects. Supporting governmental plans for clean energy require additional resources, including trainings on the technology, amending the Growth Management Act, and guidance and/or templates for Community Benefit Plans.

CNW supports the establishment of long-term funding mechanisms to engage in clean energy project reviews and the development of best practices for developers to engage with Tribal and local governments and overburdened communities. Multilingual resources and robust community engagement programs will ensure that overburdened communities are informed and can be actively involved. Recent changes to CESC Question & Answer sessions and meetings that include interpreters, real-time translation, and improved accessibility are all helpful improvements for public engagement. Thank you for providing these resources for the community.

Supporting Proactive and Responsible Renewable Energy Planning and Siting

Proactive planning, early and consistent collaboration, and responsible siting of renewable energy projects will result in the equitable and successful implementation and build-out of renewable energy resources. The need for a statewide data resource dashboard for clean energy development is identified as a missing, but necessary, resource by many involved in clean energy planning, review, permitting, development, monitoring, research, and decommissioning. The CESC is well poised to develop and maintain this resource with the help and direction of the legislature. The variety of agencies involved in CESC could collaboratively collect, assess, and incorporate statewide spatial tools and data into the project planning and permitting process. By utilizing tools, like WSU's Least Conflict Solar Siting in the Columbia Plateau, the Washington Shrubsteppe Restoration and Resiliency Initiative (WSRRI) spatial priorities, Washington Habitat Connectivity Action Plan (WAHCAP), Arid Lands Initiative (ALI) priority core and linkage areas, and other local resources, project planners and reviewers can avoid impacts to critical habitats, corridors, and other local resources, and responsibly site necessary clean energy projects. These tools could be made available on the dashboard and used to inform CEPZs or Build-Ready project potential. These transparent strategies for reviewing and directing clean energy development will ultimately reduce project opposition, minimize local impacts, and support the timely development of projects.

Supporting Transmission Infrastructure and Emerging Technologies

With growing energy demands and emerging energy technologies, such as energy storage, green hydrogen, geothermal, etc., Washington will require coordinated and collaborative siting and permitting strategies and tools. The connection and distribution of clean energy generated by proposed projects will depend on transmission capacity, upgrades, or siting. Ecology's Programmatic Environmental Impact Statements (PEIS) for onshore wind, utility-scale solar, and green hydrogen are complimentary to the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council's (EFSEC) PEIS on Transmission. A combined analysis and mapping will determine suitable corridors for energy transmission upgrades and the following clean energy projects that can connect to these lines. Assisting governments in updating codes and ordinances to accommodate these emerging renewable energy technologies will pave the way for innovative solutions and responsible development. Improving the capacity of existing transmission infrastructure must be prioritized above new transmission siting, permitting, or development.

CNW commends CESC for its thoughtful and comprehensive approach to supporting clean energy in Washington State. CNW urges CESC to consider which recommendations could be prioritized alongside previous recommendations or initiatives to enhance transparency and clarify expectations regarding what will be completed in the near term and what may not be implemented in the upcoming year. By addressing transmission capacity limitations, improving community engagement, promoting Community Benefit Plans, and supporting Tribal and local governments, CESC will help provide a strong foundation for a sustainable energy future.

CNW looks forward to continued collaboration and the successful implementation of both the 2024 and 2025 recommendations.

Thank you for your time and consideration,

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