

Grass Roots Environmental Action Team
STATEMENT ON SUNFLOWER'S PROPOSED EXPANSION

We, members of the Grass Roots Environmental Action Team (GREAT) and residents of Barton, Pawnee and Rush County, have met monthly for two years, studying many environmental issues affecting central and western Kansas. After studying one of the most important issues, proposed expansion of coal-fired generation by Sunflower at Holcomb, we have come to believe:

- This is a legacy issue because our decisions today will affect the rights and opportunities of our children and future generations to enjoy a clean healthy environment because the effects of burning coal continue to have serious adverse environmental impacts well beyond the last day the last ton of coal is burned. Like a good “neighbor”, we have moral duty to do no less for our families and those to come.
- Energy from coal will cost our businesses and families more money than is at first evident: healthcare costs, insurance rate increases, electric rate increases from carbon tax, regulations on other emissions, new coal plants. Particle emissions—lead, cadmium, thorium and uranium—are associated with asthma, lung disease, heart disease. Even with claims of their reduced emissions, mercury will still enter the atmosphere and contribute to autism, learning disabilities and attention deficit disorder.
- “Clean coal” is a myth under current regulations and technologies. Carbon dioxide has been convincingly linked to climate change, and to global warming with attendant consequences (e.g. increasing storm intensity, changing precipitation patterns, agricultural disasters or widespread crop failures). Our good decisions now can slow and even reverse the pace of climate change by developing more balanced approaches to our energy needs right here in Kansas. We Kansans can influence others to protect our air and water by example.
- The proposed plant would provide energy primarily to Colorado, Oklahoma and the southwest; Kansas would use about fifteen percent, and the prevailing winds would carry the pollution across Kansas and eastward. Kansas would be solving those states’ energy needs at our expense. Kansas can utilize its own resources, such as wind, rather than hauling coal from Wyoming and thus keep dollars now spent on coal at home. We need to invest in alternative energies that can be a ‘win-win’ for all parties.
- Wind energy is cheaper than coal. The Great Plains are ‘the Saudi Arabia of Wind Energy.’ While neighboring states are reaping the benefit of wind energy, Kansas continues to pursue a polluting form of energy. Why should we be tied to polluting technology for another fifty years while other states move toward more renewables? The National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) in Colorado says the best economic option for western Kansas is not coal, but wind. The Laboratory concludes that the Holcomb expansion will generate less economic benefit than the equivalent amount of wind power.

- How shall we reduce demand for energy and increase supply of renewable energy? This can be done with energy efficient building codes, energy star appliances, renewable portfolio standards, and net metering. We can fund this with public benefit funds, tax incentives and regulatory reform (reward utilities for investing in efficiency and renewables). We can make a difference with more efficient homes, work places and transportation. “Investment in energy efficiency and renewables create more jobs than fossil fuel investments.”
- It is projected that Sunflower Electric will drain around five billion gallons each year from an already-strained Ogallala Aquifer. Thirty-five percent of irrigated water returns to the ground, but all of the water used for coal-fired generators goes into the atmosphere as steam twenty-four round-the-clock for the next half century. Do we want to ‘mine’ this water from an already declining aquifer when we could use wind power instead?
- Our race greatly impacts this planet more than ever before. From a Biblical perspective, God put us on earth to, among other things, “...have dominion...rule over...” (Gen 1:28). We understand this to mean our relation to our environment, our world, is one in terms of care giving, even nurturing, not exploitation and despoliation. We are called to be faithful to that vision. What we do is crucial for our lives and for the development of our world. The availability of alternative energy technology offers us an opportunity to mitigate the destructive effect we are having on our planet.

The legislators who are opposed to the special interest Sunflower bill need your help in overcoming its supporters. If you also believe that the long-term consequences of coal-fired generators outweigh the unproven benefits, please contact your legislators today. You can find your legislators’ contact information in many issues of your local newspapers or on the internet at: www.accesskansas.org/legislative/.

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