

Commissioners hear opposition to wind farms

The Commissioners' Court of Clay County got a possible preview of the coming battle regarding future wind farms.

Local rancher Diaz Murray was in attendance and spoke out against the county granting tax abatements or any other potential benefits that might persuade wind farm investors from building any more projects in the county. He said the county is just rated "average" for wind energy potential and believes the drawbacks far outweigh the benefits, including the loss of personal property rights to one's land. Murray himself said he had a power transmission line constructed through his property that he didn't want.

"I'm representing every little landowner," said Murray.

Commissioner Johnny Gee of Precinct 2 said he was not pushing for or against wind farms, and all the commissioners said they had not had any official discussions with wind energy concerns. They also reiterated that the county would not become involved until and unless they were approached by a wind energy company looking to secure tax abatements or some other issue needing the approval of the commissioners.

Diaz also questioned Judge Kenneth Liggett about what he felt was a conflict of interest regarding the judge negotiating with landowners on behalf of a wind energy concern. Judge Liggett said that while he had

been in negotiations with landowners, the issue wouldn't be a conflict of interest since he plans to recuse himself from any vote concerning wind farm projects. He also said he was reluctant to say anything regarding wind farms while the commissioners were meeting because it might appear he was trying to influence their opinions about the matter.

In other action the court:

- Approved payment for all bills relating to Clay County Memorial Hospital, and heard a report about two upcoming surgeries for indigents that the county may be responsible for at up to \$30,000 per surgery.

- Approved payment of all bills relating to Clay County.

- Approved Treasurer's Monthly Affidavit for the month of October.

- Approved to continue to pay cell phone reimbursements for DPS at a maximum of \$50 per phone per month.

- Approved an order granting a permit and right-of-way to construct pipeline, road crossing and/or road cut, requested by Rife Energy Operating, INC.

- Approved Precinct 4 to dispose of junk iron.

- Approved entering into a contract with Texas Public Policy Foundation regarding the Bureau of Land Management.

Flu clinic is today

The Department of State Health Services will be conducting an immunization and flu clinic in Henrietta at the First Baptist Church, 208 S. Graham, on Thursday, November 12, from 9:30-11:30 and 1:00-4:00.

Adult and children's flu vaccines will be offered. Vaccines will also be available for kindergarten, seventh grade, and college entry. All infant immunizations will also be offered.

The Texas Department of State Health Services provides vaccines for those on Medicaid, no insurance, American Indian, Native Alaskan, and the underinsured. *CHIP and private insurance cannot receive State Vaccine*

at this clinic, and will be referred to another provider. A parent or guardian must accompany a minor. VFC vaccines are provided for \$10.00 per visit, with a maximum of \$20.00 per household. Adult vaccines are \$20.00 per visit for the adult with no insurance.

United Pharmacy will be providing flu shots for ages 7 and up; for those individuals who do not qualify for State vaccine.

Cost will be \$25.00 for children and adults

For more information regarding the clinic, please call 940-574-2159

Deer Creek

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the radar indicated that there wasn't a shower in the area. As always we are thankful for every drop that falls and keeps our lands from drying out.

This Friday & Saturday (13th/14th) I encourage all of you to attend the Beast Feast that takes place here in Deer Creek. The event was formed out of a passion of cooking and spending time with family and friends

by the Crossroads Gang. The Gang wanted to assist veterans and others by raising funds and thus the Beast Feast was created. There were will be concessions, raffles, and live music.

I will report more on this next week! Until then I hope all of you will take a moment to enjoy the beautiful autumn season!

AgriLife offers healthy cooking school

Texas A&M AgriLife Extension service will present "Dinner Tonight Healthy Cooking School" on Thursday, November 19, from 6 to 8 p.m. at Saint Mary's Parish Hall, 105 S. Barrett, in Henrietta.

During the school attendees will see demonstrations of quick and easy-to-make

recipes to create at home, learn healthy and economical meal preparation ideas, sample taste three dishes, discover new culinary tips and food preparation techniques, receive a special Dinner Tonight Cookbook, and have the opportunity to win door prizes.

Cost for the school is \$15 per person or \$20 at the door, and

spaces are limited.

Besides AgriLife, other sponsors for the school include Louisiana State University College of Humanities & Social Sciences, Texas Beef Council, Waurika Livestock Commission Company, Law Office of Seth Slagle, Diamond Food Markets, 4P Dozer-Jack Pickett, Burns Ranch, Clay County Memorial

Hospital, Luke Halsell Ranch, Scaling & Company - Ann & Wilson Scaling, Pullen Angus - Rayford & Carla Pullen and Birdwell & Clark Ranch.

To reserve a space for the school or for more information contact Sherri Halsell, Clay County Extension Agent, at shalsell@ag.tamu.org or call 940-538-5042.

Wind

Clay County, "so we're just giving you what we think."

He said most realtors have lost deals because of wind farms, since potential buyers who might be interested in land in the area want it because of the rural setting, which he said wind farms "ruin." He said even recreational users such as hunters who just want to use the land for weekend getaways or vacations are not interested because the nearby wind turbines are just too intrusive.

Stanford said he now requires buyers to sign a release saying they will not sue if a wind farm is built nearby because he is afraid of potential lawsuits.

He said there are usually only a few winners - the landowners who have wind turbines located on their property - while meanwhile the rest of the people suffer. He said wind farms will eventually cause property values and the tax base to go down in the long term.

During the question session audience members brought up a wide range of concerns, everything from how wind farms affect eminent domain to debris flying off turbine blades to possible strategies to stop wind farms because of endangered species.

One of the biggest concerns expressed by members of the audience regarded tax abatements. The Shannon wind farm project was touted in part because it will provide to the county and school districts approximately \$8 million over the next 10 years through a tax abatement agreement made between the county and the wind energy company. Many with CCAWF, including John Greer, whose family owns land and has long ties in Clay County, believe the county has no business encouraging wind energy companies by agreeing to tax abatements for a business that already is subsidized "from top to bottom," be it federal Production Tax Credits (PTC), state subsidies



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Martin Aldridge/Clay County Leader

Dr. Paul Burns speaks to the crowd at the Rock Barn last Tuesday during a meeting hosted by Clay County Against Wind Farms.

for transmission lines or local government entities offering tax breaks.

On the other hand, Greer and other opponents believe making sure the county doesn't agree to tax abatements is a good way to dissuade wind energy companies from building projects in the county.

"If you can stop the tax abatement they will probably go away," Stanford replied.

"Elected officials will do what they feel like the majority wants to do," said Burns, who encouraged residents to show up at commissioners meetings and let the commissioners know where they stand. He stressed that most commissioners were good people and urged people to always be courteous when stating their case.

Yet there are no guarantees denying tax abatements will stop a wind farm project. The only sure way, admitted Burns and Stanford, is to persuade landowners considering signing a lease that it would be bad in the long term for both their neighbors and the county.

On the other hand, many opponents felt they did not get a fair hearing on the Shannon

project, and one audience member pointed out how a petition signed by 50% of nearby landowners was seemingly ignored by the commissioners back in 2010 when elected officials voted unanimously to approve the tax abatement.

Another audience member related how he had enjoyed hunting turkeys around Sweetwater, but after a wind farm was erected the noise caused by the turbines prevented him from calling turkeys, as well as ruining the beautiful setting he had once enjoyed.

One audience member, Vance Dugger, related how he had been approached regarding a lease to erect turbines on his place and was surprised to find it was County Judge Kenneth Liggett who was negotiating on behalf of the wind energy company. He wondered how that couldn't be construed as a conflict of interest.

A check with the State Attorney General's Office and the Texas Association of Counties indicates that a conflict of interest would only arise if an elected official uses his or her office to unduly influence an issue which was officially presented before

the governing body. An elected official must also declare his or her involvement in any matter coming before the governing body and then not participate in any vote coming before the governing body he or she serves on.

Judge Liggett has stated that he will not vote on any matter coming before the Commissioners' Court regarding wind energy concerns which he is involved with (see related story about the Commissioners' Court on this page).

Again, no issues regarding a future wind farm has been officially presented to the Commissioners' Court.

CCAWF's Greer said wind farm projects typically need between 8-10 thousand acres of land. He said he has always been a big supporter of private property rights, but urges any landowner considering signing a lease to have turbines erected to give serious thought about how those towering structures - visible from many miles away - will affect their neighbors and their community.

"I would hope it would give you pause," he said.

Input

windfarm near their property, then they should convince their neighbors not to sign a lease. At that point it is a private property rights issue. If the windfarm project proceeds far enough, then the commissioners court will probably be asked by the windfarm owners to grant the

windfarm project a tax abatement.

"At that time the commissioners will become involved, and have to vote for or against an abatement. Until that time it is up to the land owners to decide what they want to do with their land."

Meanwhile Keen said he'd

like to hear more from residents about how they feel about wind farms, both those who support and those who oppose them.

"I welcome any input from the public on how they feel about it," he said. "I think that would go a long way in helping the commissioners make up

their minds."

He said the best way to contact him is either by email at claycountypct4@att.net or by regular mail at 214 N. Main Street, Henrietta, TX, which is also the official mailing address for all the other county commissioners.

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AARP

Safe Drivers Course

Save \$\$\$ on your auto insurance

Where: Clay County Senior Citizens Center
216 N. Hancock St.
Henrietta, TX 76365

When: Thursday, Nov. 19, 2015
9 a.m. to 2 p.m.

RSVP or for More Information:
Call Linda Johnston 940-716-0799 or
Clay County Seniors Citizens 940-538-5615
(Lunch will be provided for a donation of \$6.00)

CLAY COUNTY LEADER

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Waurika Livestock Commission Company

Regular Cattle Sale:
Tuesdays - 9:00 AM

To consign cattle or for information call:
Office: 580-228-2353
George Williams: cell 940-631-6001
Mike Pettit: cell 940-631-6003

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For more information, call our office

Call toll-free for a weekly market report:
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