

Renewable Energy v. Habitat
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I was excited to learn a few months ago that two solar farms are going to be installed near Dillon. The energy industries have known for decades that our oil and gas reserves are going to run out sooner or later. So it’s about time the USA started doing something to replace nonrenewable energy sources.

But I recently realized something. In our haste to install large amounts of renewable energy sources, such as solar and wind energy, we are not paying attention to the environmental damage that can cause.

The solar farm west of Dillon takes up a huge tract of land, land that appears to have been stripped of critical habitat. We live on the sagebrush steppe, an area of critical habitat that supports over 350 species of native plants and animals. For some information on steps to restore damaged rangelands in the west, refer to my website, “Management of Invasive Plants in the Western USA,” <https://www.invasiveplantswesternusa.org/sagebrush-steppe-restoration.html>

In thinking about how other countries are dealing with the need to increase the use of renewable energies, I have researched China. By 2010, China had become the largest producer of wind energy in the world. By 2012, China was producing 23% of solar energy products worldwide.

I have traveled through China extensively. In urban areas, if you stand on the roof of an apartment complex, you will typically see hundreds of solar panels, installed on all the roofs of these large buildings. Of course, the Chinese had already destroyed much natural habitat by clearing massive land areas to create huge urban centers and rural farms.

But the reality of what China has already figured out has caused me to reflect on how the USA could do this better. Would it be feasible to combine the use of wind and solar power by installing solar panels on the poles that hold windmills? We could install solar panels not only on rooftops across the USA, but also on the many structures that already exist across the rural landscape: telephone poles, fence posts, etc.

I recently learned that there are very few Federal building codes. Building codes are typically established at the local and state level. Why don’t we add some Federal building codes that require, or at least encourage, including solar panels and windmills wherever feasible on new buildings?

Dr. Delena Norris-Tull