Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs)

What is the Clean Energy Siting and Permitting (CESP) Project?

Kittitas County is reviewing and updating its local permitting process for energy technologies by completing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to evaluate suitable areas and mitigation measures for different potential energy uses.

What is the purpose of the Clean Energy Siting and Permitting (CESP) Project?

The purpose of the CESP Project is to:

- Determine what energy types are most suitable for the County to permit,
- Retain local control of permitting in Kittitas County for identified energy uses,
- Study the impacts of varying energy uses and mitigation for those impacts,
- Develop and/or modify County code, where appropriate, so project applicants and the public understand:
    - Where uses may be appropriate,
    - What studies and information are necessary to evaluate applications, and
    - The types of mitigation which may be appropriate for energy projects that are proposed in Kittitas County.
- Where energy use may be appropriate, create a streamlined permitting process.

What type(s) of energy facilities are being studied?

The Clean Energy Siting and Permitting (CESP) Project is studying the environmental impacts for the following energy types and related uses:

- Large-scale solar,
- Large-scale wind,
- Geothermal energy,
- Battery energy storage systems (BESS), and
- Small modular reactors (SMRs).

These energy uses were selected by Kittitas County and confirmed by the Board of County Commissioners to address both established and emerging technologies for a reflective and proactive approach.

Doesn't the County already permit these energy types?

Some of them, yes.

Kittitas County has permitting processes and pre-identified areas for solar and wind energy facilities, while specific permitting processes for battery energy storage systems (BESS) and geothermal energy have not been developed. Small modular reactors (SMRs) using nuclear fission would be permitted through appropriate state and federal processes.

This project both assesses the existing energy permitting processes in the county and may expand the energy uses the County permits to include emerging technologies of geothermal energy, SMRs, and BESS. This study considers appropriate energy locations, related impacts, and potential measures to reduce impacts. By assessing and streamlining the permitting process, the project aims to reduce hurdles in areas where a project may be appropriately sited and create a more efficient and predictable environment for energy development.

Does this project mean the energy types will be developed in Kittitas County?

No. This project is a proactive measure to strengthen local permitting and provide clarity in development processes - including locations, application requirements, and mitigation measures for these uses - if the County is approached by parties interested in developing these energy uses.

If Kittitas County does not provide a permitting pathway for energy projects, is there a possibility that they still may be built?

Yes. If Kittitas County does not provide a permitting pathway for varying energy projects, they may still be permitted by the Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) permitting process.

Therefore, if Kittitas County does not create proactive codes which identify appropriate locations for possible future projects and identify mitigation to address possible project impacts, a project may still be permitted and built. This project is focused on providing permit pathways that not only provide predictability to applicants, but also keep permitting decisions local, so the community has a stronger voice.

How else would this project help the Kittitas County community?

Through an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process, this project will study the potential impacts of different energy uses and ways to mitigate those potential impacts.

If a future applicant decides to permit an energy project through the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) permitting process in the future instead of permitting through Kittitas County, the County will be in a better position to advocate for proper siting and proper project mitigation.

Will the result of this project be new code and development standards which will automatically allow uses in certain areas?

No. The result of this project may include the development of new and modified codes. These codes will more thoroughly outline where uses may be sited if code requirements are met, the standards, studies, and other information which must be provided as part of an application, and the types of mitigation which should be evaluated within an application.

Each application submitted under new codes will then be individually evaluated for compliance with Kittitas County code and under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA). Future applications will also include opportunities for public noticing, commenting, and appeals.

The County is completing a SEPA Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) as part of this project. What does that mean?

A Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) under the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) evaluates the environmental effects of broad, planning-level proposals, rather than site-specific projects. It is used when decisions involve multiple projects, long-term implementation, or large geographic areas. The Programmatic EIS provides enough detail to compare planning alternatives, assess cumulative effects, and develop broad mitigation strategies.

Site-specific projects will then be separately evaluated under SEPA and County code. Separate opportunities for public involvement are also provided at the project level.

I like/dislike the idea of certain energy facilities being built in Kittitas County; how can I share my input?

There will be opportunities throughout the project to provide input related to the specific energy uses being studied.

Helpful feedback the project team would appreciate comments on include:

- Concerns related to potential environmental impacts in Kittitas County to adequately "scope" the study;
- Locations of interest or concern within Kittitas County;
- Mitigation methods to reduce potential impacts;
- Potential community benefits communities would like to see;

It is important to remember that where Kittitas County does not provide a permitting pathway for energy projects, they may still be permitted by the Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) permitting process.

Therefore, helping shape where uses may be appropriate and appropriate types of mitigation to require for future applications will be very helpful in creating a streamlined code, which assists in keeping local permitting decisions local.

How can I participate in this process?

Kittitas County has created a website for this project (https://www.co.kittitas.wa.us/cds/cesp.aspx). The website outlines the project goals, schedule, and opportunities for you to get involved. It will host important project information during comment periods and offers a location for you to sign up to get notified to receive notice for public events, meetings, and public hearings.

How can I stay updated about this project?

Signing up for newsletters using the QR code will keep you updated as project developments occur during the project.

Kittitas County has a project website that provides information on project related events, documents, project schedule, and ongoing project updates for the duration of the project. The County will collaborate with local jurisdictions, community groups, and more through social media to share information and event notifications.

Visit the project website at the QR code above

Energy Use and Permitting

How are energy projects permitted in Kittitas County?

There are two different agencies which may permit energy projects:

1. Kittitas County
2. Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC).

Developers can choose the specific permitting process for their project; each has tradeoffs and considerations associated with it. The Department of Ecology provides a comparison of the permitting pathways (https://apps.ecology.wa.gov/publications/documents/2406001.pdf).

Providing local permitting options which are streamlined, efficient, and mitigate project impacts should result in more projects being submitted to the County vs. the EFSEC process.

The Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) process is done with the EFSEC Council making a final recommendation to the governor for approval. This process can bypass local County regulations. EFSEC has jurisdictional authority over nuclear fission energy facilities, including certain small modular reactors (SMRs). You can learn more about EFSEC here: https://efsec.wa.gov/.

What types of clean energy uses are permitted in the county currently?

Kittitas County currently permits the following clean energy uses:

- Solar energy systems, ranging from residential solar panels to utility-scale solar farms (KCC 17.61C);
- Wind energy projects, with both small-scale turbines and major wind farms already operational (KCC 17.61A and KCC 17.61B); and
- Geothermal energy, as a “special utility facility” (KCC 17.61.020(6)).

Battery energy storage systems (BESS) are not specifically addressed in current code and may be treated as facilities associated with energy generation facilities or as standalone facilities using other County processes under KCC 17.61.

Small modular reactors using nuclear fission would be subject to the Washington State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) process and include a land use consistency hearing.

What do large scale solar facilities include?

Large scale solar facilities, sometimes referred to as “utility-scale” or “solar farms”, refer to technologies that absorb energy from the sun. Photovoltaic (PV) solar systems consist of absorbing solar panels, while older technologies include concentrating or reflecting solar energy. Large scale PV systems differ from rooftop solar panels or solar microgrid facilities by both the scale of the energy generated and where the energy generated goes. Large scale solar facilities typically require an onsite collection and substation system and interconnect with the transmission grid.

To learn more about solar energy, visit the following resources:

How Does Solar Work? | Department of Energy

What do large scale wind facilities include?

Large scale wind facilities, sometimes referred to as “utility-scale” or “wind farms”, refer to a generate electricity from the wind using turbines and energy from the wind. The large-scale wind facilities require coordination with several agencies regarding use of airspace and can be a collection of wind turbines arranged on the same or a series of adjacent properties. Similar to large scale solar facilities, they need an onsite collection and substation system.

To learn more about wind energy, visit the following resources:

Wind Energy Basics | Department of Energy

What is a “Battery Energy Storage System” (BESS)?

Some energy facilities, such as solar and wind, cannot generate electricity constantly. Similarly, electrical grids do not always need energy at the same time as energy is generated. BESS facilities are technology which can store energy generated for later use.

To learn more about BESS, visit the following resources:

Solar Integration: Solar Energy and Storage Basics | Department of Energy

Battery Energy Storage Systems Are Here: Is Your Community Ready? | Feature | PNNL

What is geothermal energy?

Geothermal energy consists of accessing the heat generated under the surface of the earth. To utilize geothermal energy for electricity generation, three elements are needed: heat, fluid, and permeability (small paths in soils for fluid movement). A variety

of systems, conventional and emerging technologies, use geothermal heat to produce steam or hot liquid that then spin turbines.

To learn more about geothermal energy, visit the following resources:

Geothermal Basics | Department of Energy

Geothermal Electricity Generation | Department of Energy

What is a "Small Modular Reactor" (SMR)?

Small Modular Reactor (SMR) facilities are advanced nuclear reactors. These facilities are smaller than conventional nuclear power facilities and are modular, meaning they can be factory assembled and transported for installation.

To learn more about this type of energy facility, visit the following resources:

Advanced Small Modular Reactors (SMRs) | Department of Energy

What are Small Modular Reactors | International Atomic Energy Agency

Siting of small modular reactors (SMRs) | EFSEC