Japanese American and National Park Groups Infuriated by Biden Administration’s Decision to Mar the Sanctity of Minidoka National Historic Site

WASHINGTON -- Today, the Biden Administration issued a Final Environmental Impact Statement, advancing the massive Lava Ridge Wind Project just outside Minidoka National Historic Site where over 13,000 people of Japanese ancestry were wrongly incarcerated during World War II. Approving the wind farm reflects a refusal to preserve these hallowed lands, where Japanese Americans were sent after being forced to leave their homes and placed in concentration camps, marking one of the largest unconstitutional forced removals in U.S. history. The plan currently would allow Lava Ridge to operate 241 wind turbines, each up to 660 feet tall, on the landscape.

“At the request of the Bureau of Land Management, we provided detailed historical research to the Biden Administration to enable them to better protect the lands where American citizens of Japanese ancestry were unjustly incarcerated and exploited for labor to clear land and build infrastructure,” said Robyn Achilles, Executive Director of Friends of Minidoka. “Most of that research was disregarded in this decision. They are choosing to flout National Park Service policies which protect a historic landscape in favor of a highly damaging and obstructive project. The Biden Administration needs to do a better job and make a real commitment to protect Minidoka and our heritage, or we will be dealing with Lava Ridge and other projects forever.”

Minidoka was initially protected in the National Park System in 2001. Since then, through several funding and legislative efforts, restoration of the site and several buildings has taken place. Today, survivors, descendants and visitors can experience the historic site where the vastness was intended to make those incarcerated feel isolated. Legal scholars have described the Japanese American incarceration as one of the worst violations of constitutional rights in American history.

The National Park Service identified the Lava Ridge project’s significant negative impacts on Minidoka National Historic Site, "primary amongst them is the potential for this project to negatively affect the historical integrity of Minidoka NHS, especially the setting, feeling, and Association."

National Park Service documents state:

*The Lava Ridge Project would fundamentally change the psychological and physical feelings of remoteness and isolation one experiences when visiting Minidoka NHS, as the lands north would be transformed into a large-scale renewable energy site marked by hundreds of wind*
turbines, transmission towers and associated ancillary infrastructure. Approaching the site and walking its grounds, visitors would no longer experience the feeling of a rural, undeveloped landscape recalling what Minidoka was like during World War II. Additionally, the night skies at Minidoka are integral to its cultural and historical fabric. The NPS is concerned that night skies will be impacted by light sources emanating from the project, thereby altering visitors’ experience and capacity to see the nightscapes experienced by those who lived at the camp during World War II.

“Today’s decision deepens a wound for our families and community,” said Minidoka descendant Janet Matsuoka Keegan. “Minidoka is a solemn site of commemoration, remembrance, and reflection where people can try to understand a tragic time for our country. The decision to move ahead with such an obstructive project disrespects and disregards this solemn ground.”

“This plan runs afoul of National Park Service laws and policies,” said Kristen Brengel, Senior Vice President of Government Affairs at the National Parks Conservation Association (NPCA). “Preserving the views at Minidoka are critical to the experience for survivors, descendants, and visitors. Minidoka National Historic Site is a place of reflection and healing and has been managed in that way for more than 20 years. This decision flies in the face of this administration’s commitment to protecting cultural landscapes. While they’ve taken care of many cultural landscapes, this decision is a massive disappointment.”

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