

Wind farms threaten Swiss forests and direct democracy

"Long-term destruction of forests, unresolved disposal issues"

by Elias Vogt*



Elias Vogt.
(Picture Freie
Landschaft Schweiz)

In around two years, the Swiss population will vote on two groundbreaking proposals: the Forest Protection Initiative and the Community Protection Initiative. These proposals concern the planned construction of over 1,000 large wind turbines in the Swiss countryside.

Protect endangered forests

Under the pretext of climate protection, large areas of forest are currently being cleared to make way for numerous wind turbines. In the canton of Zurich alone, around 100 wind turbines are planned, almost all of them in the middle of valuable forests. For each wind turbine, an area of forest the size of a football field would have to be cleared to transport and then assemble the huge components. Today's wind turbines are up to 250 metres high, which is taller than any other building in Switzerland. The *Forest Protection Initiative* aims to ban forest clearing for wind turbines to protect forests and forest edges in Switzerland.

Securing direct democracy

To push through the construction of wind turbines even against the will of the affected population, several cantons have decided in recent months to abolish the population's right to have a say. Under the guise of "speeding up the process", the affected communities have been silenced. The *Community Protection Initiative* wants all affected communities to continue to be able to vote on wind turbines. If a community wants a wind farm, it should be allowed to say yes. If it does not want it, it has the right to reject it. Votes should take place as early as possible in



Windfarm Gersbach in the Black Forest (Germany), 2023 under construction. (Picture Freie Landschaft Schweiz)

the planning process to provide clarity in good time.

Abandoning 150 years of forest protection?

The concerns about protecting democracy and the forest are actually a matter of course in Switzerland. The *Forest Protection Act*, which basically prohibits deforestation, has been in force since 1872. This law was the first nature conservation law in Switzerland. It ensured that the forest resource was not overused.

With the increasing urban sprawl and pave over our country, the forest has become the most important refuge for animals and plants. Permanent clearing for wind turbines would create aisles in the forest, which would heat up the forest, create areas exposed to the wind and drive away numerous wild animals and birds.

Wind turbines in forests kill a particularly large number of birds, bats and insects because the rotor blades race through the forest at speeds of up to 400 km/h, destroying everything in their path. Wind turbines in forests are a crime against nature!

Ensuring a say in the communities

Until now, the right of communities to have a say has also been a matter of course throughout the country. In all cantons except Solothurn, Neuchâtel and Fribourg, it has been legally established that the local communities have a say in decisions about wind farms. Even in the three cantons that are exceptions, the communities or the canton have found ways to allow the popula-

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tion to vote on wind farms in a consultative or indirect manner. However, this right to have a say is too big a hurdle for many electricity companies. In numerous cantons, they have recently succeeded in abolishing the population's right to have a say. In Schaffhausen, Lucerne and St. Gallen, the population no longer has a say. In the canton of Zurich, the director of construction recently said that he considered the population's right to have a say to be "democratically questionable".

Little wind, lots of subsidies

How is it that 1,000 wind turbines are being planned in Switzerland when there is much less wind in Switzerland than in coastal areas? How is it that there was only one windmill in Switzerland, but now suddenly there is enough wind to erect 1,000 wind turbines in our landscape? The explanation is simple: it is not that the wind has increased, but since 2008 there have been extremely high subsidies that make the construction of wind turbines lucrative for electricity companies.

Billions in subsidies for rich electricity companies

If an electricity company wants to build a wind turbine, it must invest around 10 million Swiss francs. Between 2008 and 2022, the federal government awarded so-called "remuneration commitments", which guarantee the operators of wind turbines revenues of around 25 million Swiss francs over a period of 20 years. The guaranteed profit is therefore 150%. We all pay for these subsidies through our electricity bills, namely with a surcharge on every kilowatt hour consumed. An operator of a wind farm with 20 wind turbines must therefore invest £150 million but receives £300 million in return over 20 years. That is CHF 300 million in guaranteed profit. At the same time, the electricity companies are already making billions from electricity trading without sharing the profits with consumers.

Lucrative business in a green guise

Since 2022, there have been no more "remuneration commitments", but instead one-off "investment contributions". The federal government will pay 60% of the investments from the same pot as the "remuneration commitments". That is "only" CHF 6 million per wind turbine. However, the operator is then free to sell the



Clearing near the wind farm in Tramelan (BE), currently under construction. (Picture Freie Landschaft Schweiz)

electricity on the market and keep all the revenue. This can generate many more millions of Swiss francs, leaving the operator with a huge profit.

The operator never has to repay the federal subsidies. It is, so to speak, a free donation from the Swiss state, financed by compulsory levies on the population. This is the only reason why wind turbines are even being discussed in Switzerland. Large electricity companies and investors want to make profits from them and can also give themselves a "green guise".

Contribution to electricity supply is negligible

Wind turbines cannot make a significant contribution to energy supply in Switzerland. Switzerland's current annual electricity consumption is around 60,000 GWh (gigawatt hours). In the colder winter months from October to March, it is 40,000 GWh. Due to digitalisation, the electrification of transport, the addition of heat pumps and the construction of new data centres, electricity consumption is likely to rise to 100,000 GWh per year, 60,000 GWh of which will be in the winter months. This means that there will be a shortfall of 20,000 GWh in the winter months alone. With the phasing out of nuclear power plants by 2040, there will be an additional shortfall of 12,000 GWh during the winter months. This means that we urgently need 32,000 GWh during the winter months to cover our electricity consumption. However, wind turbines in Switzerland only produce around 3 GWh per turbine during the winter months, with a maximum of 4 GWh.

This means that to meet demand, almost 10,000 wind turbines would have to be built in Switzerland.

Wind power is a drop in the ocean

A maximum addition of 400 wind turbines in Switzerland by 2040 can be considered realistic on a technical and a social level. Even if this expansion were to be implemented, it would only generate 1,400 GWh of electricity during the winter months. That is a drop in the ocean. Comparing the potential of wind energy in Switzerland with solar power makes the insignificance of wind power even clearer. By 2024, many solar panels will have been installed on house roofs. The solar roofs built in 2024 alone will produce 3000 GWh over the whole year, a quarter of which, or 750 GWh, will be produced during the winter months. The calculation is simple: within two years, enough solar panels will be installed in Switzerland to exceed the total wind energy potential in Switzerland during the winter months. The potential of wind power is therefore negligible.

Solar energy

is much more important than wind power

With solar panels on house roofs, no trees are felled, no civil rights are violated, no birds are killed and no noise or shadows are produced. In addition, solar panels produce three times as much energy in the summer months as in winter: this enormous surplus can be stored and used again in winter. The electricity is consumed locally, and the population becomes less dependent on the electricity grid. Solar energy may have a low efficiency, but with over 100,000 GWh per year, it has enormous potential. There are therefore sufficient alternatives available to dispense with harmful wind turbines in forests – and to respect the population's right to have a say in the construction of wind turbines.

Unreliable fluctuating electricity

Wind power produces random fluctuating electricity. Wind turbines can only be switched off, not switched on when needed. The average efficiency of wind turbines in Switzerland is less than 20%. The electricity cannot be stored locally. The often-heard claim that wind turbines can supply thousands of households is therefore false. When there is no wind, there is no electricity from wind energy. Other power plants then must step in. Wind power plants are even superfluous because a second infrastructure is needed to replace them.



No wind farms in forests and construction of wind farms only with prior veto rights for the affected population: the initiative committee in front of the Federal Parliament in Bern on 25 July 2025, submitting the Forest Protection Initiative and the Community Protection Initiative.
(Picture: "Freie Landschaft Schweiz")

Short portrait of "Freie Landschaft Schweiz"

The association known as "Schweizerische Vereinigung Landschaft ohne Windkraft – Association suisse paysage sans éoliennes"



[Swiss Association for Landscapes without Wind Turbines] was founded on 15 January 2004 and renamed "Paysage Libre – Freie Landschaft" [Free Landscape] (<https://www.paysage-libre.ch/>) in 2011. The association's goal is to bring together, represent and coordinate individuals and organisations at the national level who are committed to protecting nature, especially flora and fauna, from human intervention and against the disfigurement of the landscape by industrial wind turbines. In addition to its individual members, "Paysage Libre Suisse – Freie Landschaft Schweiz" currently has around 55 member organisations from all over Switzerland, representing over 5,000 people. Elias Vogt is the president of the association.

Would you like to hear different perspectives on wind power? Read "Völlig durch den Wind" (Completely blown away) at <https://sichtweisenschweiz.ch/politik/voellig-durch-den-wind/>

Unresolved disposal, long-term destruction of forests

As the situation in Germany shows, the dismantling of wind turbines remains unresolved. The rotor blades (made of glued fibreglass and plastic) in particular cannot be recycled but must currently be shredded and incinerated in waste facilities. The 2,500-tonne concrete bases per turbine remain in the ground forever. No large trees will ever be able to grow on the site anymore. In addition, the huge areas of forest soil that are compacted by heavy construction machinery during construction and dismantling will be less fertile for over 100 years.

Preserving and protecting Swiss values

The enormous damage that wind turbines would cause to residents, nature and the landscape is disproportionate to the minimal benefits. The initiatives to protect Swiss forests and give municipalities a say in decision-making aim to continue to safeguard proven nature conservation and direct democracy, even after

150 years. It is important to protect Switzerland's important pillars from the greed of the electricity companies: namely, an intact landscape, a rich biodiversity and our globally unique democracy!

Source: <https://sichtweisenschweiz.ch/politik/windkraftwerke-bringen-schweizer-waelder-und-demokratie-in-gefahr/>

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