**Citation:**

Uma Outka, *The Renewable Energy Footprint*, 30 STAN. ENVTL. L.J. 241 (2011); FSU College of Law, Public Law Research Paper No. 475.

**Other Sources:**

<http://ssrn.com/abstract=1711891>

**Abstract:**

With the shift toward renewable energy comes the potential for staggering land impacts – many millions of acres may be consumed to meet demand for electricity and fuel over the next 20 years. To conservationists’ dismay, the more renewable energy we use, the more land we need. This article is concerned with two primary questions: What are the implications of renewable energy development for land use and land use law, and how might the land use context inform emerging energy policy?

Siting power plants and transmission lines is notoriously difficult, and renewable energy has proved no exception. As investment in the sector has grown, so has dissatisfaction with existing siting frameworks. This perceived inadequacy has led to a flurry of siting-related law and policymaking tailored to large-scale renewable energy infrastructure. So-called NIMBYs opposing renewable projects are derided for hindering the green economy. Almost reflexively, we hear, it’s a “trade-off”: shrink the carbon footprint, grow the land use footprint.

This article rejects the trade-off reflex as counterproductive for both causes – it presents an often false choice that obscures legitimate land use concerns and slows renewable development. Instead, our focus should be on deliberately crafting law that avoids needless compromise wherever we can. This perspective demands a far greater integration of energy policy and land use law. To date and across the board, regulatory apparatus for siting is almost exclusively fixated on site-specific land use. Although this remains important, it reflects a worrisome myopia given the land impacts at stake. Accordingly, I argue, cumulative land impacts should be a central consideration in the development and implementation of energy policy.