# Florida wind project timeline slows down, waiting for summer hearing

April 1, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle | Section: Local Headlines | 542 Words
OpenURL Link

FLORIDA -- A state magistrate in Boston has set a late summer hearing date for an appeal against the Hoosac Wind power project, which may keep the 20-wind turbine project from going up until next year.

The ruling, which came at a prehearing conference at the Division of Administrative Law Appeals in Boston on Monday, could be a setback for the project.

The developer, California-based enXco, had wanted a ruling on the matter by April so it could begin the five- to six-month construction project this spring.

The company had hoped to have the turbines up and running by the end of the year to take advantage of federal tax credits, which have not yet been renewed past 2005.

The company plans to erect 11 wind turbines -- which are 340 feet from the ground to the tip of the highest blade -- on Florida's Bakke Mountain, with another nine on Crum Hill in neighboring Monroe.

The $40 million project would have a capacity of about 30 megawatts.

At Monday's hearing, Administrative Magistrate Natalie Monroe set a litigation schedule for the appeal. Both sides will submit direct testimony by mid-June, and the process may include a discovery process and a site visit.

A hearing has been set for Aug. 16-18 in Boston. After that, Monroe will make a ruling on the merits of the case. It is unclear how long it would take her to reach a conclusion. At issue is whether the wind power project has taken into account wetlands protections for roads leading to the sites.

Last November, a group of 10 Florida residents appealed against the project. They are joined by a group of 36 other Berkshire County residents, who on Monday were allowed to enter into the proceedings.

They objected to the DEP's "superseding order of conditions" for the project, which was issued last fall to minimize wetlands impacts.

The developers hoped to have the matter resolved before the spring construction season began.

The state Department of Environmental Protection agreed, and in February recommended that the appeals process be expedited.

DEP Counsel Pamela D. Harvey wrote that the project "supports a substantial public interest by providing a source of renewable energy, consistent with the commonwealth's goals for energy development."

DALA Chief Administrative Magistrate Christopher Connolly said Thursday the August date is reasonably expedited, as many cases "can take years."

"This is litigation," he said. "Getting hearing dates four months down the road is very reasonable."

Eleanor Tillinghast of the group Green Berkshires, who is among the intervening group, said she is pleased with the schedule.

"It seemed reasonable for everyone," she said. "We recognize they want an expedited review and we made every effort to find a schedule that is mutually acceptable."

DEP spokeswoman Eva Tor said work will not be able to begin while the process is continuing, but said the developer could do work outside the area in question.

Hoosac Wind officials could not be reached for comment.

Wind power has emerged as a contentious topic in North County. Supporters say it is an important step in moving the nation's energy supply away from fossil fuels, and point to the tax and lease payments the developers will pay to the towns.

Opponents insist the turbines will spoil the natural beauty of the Berkshires, and that their energy supply potential has been exaggerated.

# Most people are in favor of wind facilities

March 16, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Section: Letters | 719 Words
OpenURL Link

To the Transcript editor:

As the debate about wind energy continues, I read with interest the recent letters and op-eds on both sides. To paraphrase what Lauren Stevens recently stated so eloquently, wind energy is only a part of a solution, and not even the largest at that. However, to read certain individuals comments, one would believe wind turbines to be objects designed solely for the destruction of our landscape and way of life.

In the past I have enjoyed visiting the Searsburg wind project. Last year, I had the pleasure of visiting a wind turbine in Hull. We were nearly able to drive right up to the base of the tower, and look across a football field (that would be what, 100 yards?) at the closest building -- the local school! The Hull wind turbine is the largest in all New England at 240 feet in height, and it enjoys widespread community support to the point that the town is now considering adding an additional turbine. As we stood watching the blades slowly turn to a gentle whomp, whomp, I became mesmerized watching a seagull soar in perfect harmony with the turbine. Sadly, this sensation was disrupted a few seconds later when a plane roared overhead, totally drowning out the quiet conversation I had been having with myself.

Hull is not alone in its support of wind energy. In fact, what appears to be a common occurrence in the United Kingdom was explained by the BBC: "Initial concerns over the impact of turbines on the landscape, noise, and construction traffic, had largely vanished after development was completed."

I would like to mention two arguments that have been a focus of recent op-ed columns/letters to the editor: low frequency noise and ice throw. I find interesting a statement by Geoff Leventhall, an acknowledged expert in low-frequency noise, a fellow of both the Institute of Physics and of the Institute of Acoustics, and previously the president of the Institute of Acoustics: "I can state quite categorically that there is no significant infrasound from current designs of wind turbines. To say that there is an infrasound problem is one of the hares which objectors to wind farms like to run. There will not be any effects from infrasound from the turbines."

The interesting location of the Hull wind turbine seems to support this statement.

Any ice throw from turbines is certainly not something to be taken lightly. However, there has not been a single reported injury due to ice throw from wind turbines, despite thousands of installation's around the world. Under non-academic, actual, everyday conditions, ice is highly unlikely to be thrown over 750 to 1,000 feet (even these distances appear to be quite rare).

As the nearest resident to Hoosac Wind is around twice that distance, the danger to residents is practically nonexistent. An excellent, though somewhat technical discussion of ice throw can be found at www.vtt.fi/virtual/arcticwind/ boreasiv/assessment_of_safety.pdf.

The Secretary of Environmental Affairs for Massachusetts has stated about the Hoosac Wind project that "the project as designed has significant positive impacts, and the proponent has avoided and minimized the potential negative impacts to the greatest extent feasible."

Wind energy is presently one of very few renewable, non-polluting sources of energy available at a comparable monetary cost to traditional sources, and likely the only one that could be expanded substantially in this region. For instance, although only a fraction of dams are used to produce power, many of the remainder perform other necessary functions.

If any town wishes to not host a wind power plant, residents can institute a bylaw to that effect. However, I think that it is hugely encouraging and inspiring that in the coming years, with a few projects in towns such as Hancock, Florida and Monroe, the Northern Berkshire area could supply the equivalent of over a third of its electricity through new sustainable energy -- the wind.

Thus far, the Hoosac Wind project has proceeded with widespread community support. If certain individuals wish to oppose the project with lawsuits, that is their legal right, although most of us do not agree with their stance. I certainly do not pretend to speak for the town leaders or those who have elected them. But Vera Kelton's recent statement that supporters do not care about, nor listen to, her concerns could not be farther from the truth. That does not mean, however, that we have to agree with them all.

Simon Zelazo

Florida

March 12

# Stanley Brown steps down, but not out

March 16, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript | Section: Local Headlines | 605 Words
OpenURL Link

FLORIDA -- In this mountain town, if you're not a Burdick, you're an Oleson, and if you're not an Oleson, you're a Brown.

And, if you're talking about a Brown -- Stanley L. Brown, to be exact -- well, he's as much a part of the town as the bricks of the Florida Baptist Church or the town's famous turnips or the asphalt on the Mohawk Trail.

After 24 years as town moderator and 32 years on the town's finance committee -- 15 years as the chairman, Brown will be stepping down from both positions at the end of his terms.

But, at 71 years old, looking back at a lifetime of service for his community, Brown said, "Well, I'm not going to quit."

Instead of retiring to the real Florida [state] with Maralyn Brown, his wife of 46 years, he plans to continue as the historical commission chairman, preparing for Florida's upcoming bicentennial celebration -- happening in mid-June. He's also a vocal proponent of wind energy, strongly backing the controversial 20-turbine Hoosac Wind project slated to come to town by the end of the year.

"I'll tell you, I don't think you can find anyone in town that loves the town as much as Stanley Brown does, and he's shown it through his work for the town," said Selectmen Chairman Ray Burdick. "We'll miss him as moderator, but he'll be there when we need him. He's not going anywhere."

In addition to his current official positions, Brown was on the school committee from 1960 to 1963 and the selectman's board from 1964 to 1973. Even as a teenager, he pitched in, like many other kids his age, cutting brush along the Mohawk Trail as a job for extra pocket change.

"We started cutting once we were old enough to swing a scythe," Brown said at his home on South Street, dressed in worn working jeans, and coifed with a full head of white hair and a thick white beard.

Brown was also a founding member of the Florida Volunteer Fire Department in 1954, and helped construct the Hairpin Turn and several buildings in town (including his own) when he worked as a builder and carpenter. He's one heck of a Hoosac Tunnel buff to boot, and he describes in detail the tunnels creation as easily as he exhales.

When asked what drove him to do all the work he does for the town, Brown said, "I guess it must be in my blood, because my father did it, my grandfather did it, and my great-grandfather did it. It's just a natural thing to do, to be a part of the town, to participate, to make it a decent place to live."

Brown said his family lived in town since 1800, with his great-great-grandfather Harvey Brown settling in Goshen 200 years ago.

Brown said he's mainly leaving as moderator, because he developed tinnitis -- a persistent ringing in the ears, which makes the job of a meeting organizer a little difficult.

"It's from too many rock concerts -- or when you're not using proper ear protection when changing a muffler. And I'm sure getting old has something to do with it," said Brown.

Brown has four children. Two have taken up the family tradition, as daughter Susan is the town administrator, and

son Steven is the unopposed candidate to replace Stan as moderator.

"[Stanley Brown] is a very, very dedication man to the town of Florida," said Barbara Cummings, who's been on the finance committee with Brown since 1983. "He's been wonderful to work with and we're going to miss him. He's been at it for many years."

# Harnessing the wind

March 14, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: Headlines | 2089 Words
OpenURL Link

Windmills at the Searsburg Wind Facility in Searsburg Vt., are 190 feet high. In contrast, the turbines proposed for Florida would be 340 feet tall. Photos: Caroline Bonnivier / Berkshire Eagle Staff

Stanley L. Brown's family has lived in the town of Florida since circa 1800, and in his 71 years he has seen the place -- population 696 last year -- repeatedly step into the forefront of energy issues.

It goes back to the Hoosac Tunnel, the marvel of mid-19th century engineering that laid almost five miles of railroad track under Hoosac Mountain at a cost of 200 lives and more than $21 million.

Energy has always been a part of the tunnel project. Early in the 20th century, the Deerfield River -- which courses along Florida's eastern edge -- was dammed, in part to provide electricity to get trains through the tunnel.

That first hydropower plant was replaced by a bigger, more complicated one during the early 1970s.

"Times have changed quite a bit since then. A lot of the laws have changed," Brown said. "At that time, there was very little objection from anybody concerning the environment."

But today, as Florida appears poised to move into a new direction energy-wise, environmental concerns do stand in the way.

To many people, the proposed Hoosac Wind project -- which would bring 11 turbines to Florida's Bakke Mountain and nine to neighboring Monroe -- represents an important part of the future of power generation.

Just as the power of flowing

water was used to help fuel the age of rail transportation, developers of the Hoosac project want to harness wind power to satisfy the growing demand for electricity in New England.

Opponents, however, raise a host of concerns about the $40 million project. They insist that giant wind turbines, which are 340 feet high, would spoil the magnificent Berkshire vistas that are cherished by natives and visitors alike. They also doubt that wind power is the solution its supporters say it is, and insist the turbines are being planned without adequate thought for environmental consequences, including the damage to forests and streams by access roads and the possibility of injury to migrating birds and bats.

On fast track

The project likely will go before the state Division of Administrative Law Appeals before the end of this month. The state Department of Environmental Protection has recommended a fast-track process that could be completed before April, and construction of the turbines could be completed by the end of the year.

Before any towers are built, however, the merits of the project will be debated. Florida Town Administrator Susan Brown, who is Stanley's daughter, said the town still relishes its role in helping to develop new ways to generate power.

"I think the people who are for it feel, at least from what I can tell, that they are doing something to take a stand for alternative energy," she said. "They could take pride in being a town on the cutting edge of it."

She said positions on the wind turbine issue have remained stable since a nonbinding town ballot question in May 2003, when 170 voted in favor of the project and 47 against it, with 48 percent of the residents turning out.

Financial appeal

Brown said much of the appeal is financial. The estimated value of taxes and royalty payments from the developers to the town would amount to between $100,000 and $150,000, a considerable sum for a town with a $2.25 million budget and almost no commercial or industrial tax base.

In general, wind power enjoys a great deal of support from environmentalists as an alternative, renewable power source that offsets in part the need to use coal and natural gas, fossil fuels that are the mainstays of power generation and contribute to everything from smog to global warming.

But environmentalists don't speak with one voice on the subject.

Eleanor Tillinghast, who directs the group Green Berkshires, opposes wind power. She said part of the support for that power comes from a desire within the movement to go beyond just trying to convince people about the global-warming effects of fossil fuels, and to start doing something about it.

"There is an unwillingness on the part of the general public to take strong measures [to fight global warming]," Tillinghast said. "Wind power is a symbol that becomes real when you see it standing on a mountain. We can point to that turbine and say, 'We are doing something about this problem.' "

Call for conservation

She said that instead of relying on what she called eyesores atop mountains, the better option would be rigorous energy efficiency and conservation programs.

"If we had tough standards for everything from appliances to traffic signals, we would make up the difference," Tillinghast said.

Residents who live near the proposed Florida site suggest a host of reasons why the project should not proceed.

Vera Kelton, whose property on Tilda Hill Road is adjacent to the site, said her concerns range from ice being thrown from the blades to the noise the turbines would make.

She said she has been to see the turbines in Searsburg, Vt., twice, and while she doesn't think they are ugly, she said the scale of the proposed Hoosac project -- with its 340-foot-high turbines as compared with the 190-foot high ones in Vermont -- is troublesome.

'Green tokenism'

"I love not only the mountain and its people, but I love the land," she said. ... "I'm not convinced by what the wind people are telling us about how environmentally friendly it is. I think it is more green-tokenism than anything else."

Not all opponents of the project believe the issue comes down to environmental soundness. Some, such as North Adams City Councilor Clark H. Billings, doubt whether man-made climate changes even exist.

Billings said he is surprised to find himself on the same side of the argument with environmentalists, as he has disagreed with them on a host of high-profile issues in the county, particularly whether to allow extensive recreational and other economic development at Greylock Glen in Adams -- a 1,063-acre, state-owned site at the

foot of Mount Greylock.

"[Tillinghast] and I argue tooth and nail on Greylock Glen, but we're joined at the hip on the issues of windmills," Billings said.

Billings' opposition to the Hoosac Wind project began early. He said his objections were based on the aesthetics of the Florida turbines, which would be clearly visible from parts of downtown North Adams.

But with time, he became convinced the project was a waste of money. He said that the generating capacity of the plants is overstated, and that there hasn't been an adequate environmental review of the plan.

The Hoosac plant would have a capacity of about 30 megawatts. But because the wind does not blow at the same rate all the time, the actual output of the plant is subject to debate. All power generated in the New England region goes onto a common electricity grid, where it is bought and sold by wholesalers and retailers such as Massachusetts Electric and Western Massachusetts Electric. Because the electricity that powers your television or toaster is the same -- whether it is generated by wind, coal or nuclear reactors -- renewable electricity is designated by credits, which consumers can buy to support green power.

Mass. Electric customers, for example, can choose to participate in the "GreenerWatts New England" program, which promises a certain amount of their electricity will come from green power sources. The program costs an additional 2.2 cents for every kilowatt hour of power used, which means an additional $7 to $13 per month for an average household.

For wind opponents such as Billings, the entire system is built on faith on the part of most environmentalists, who have grabbed onto wind power without much thought.

'In a controlled fashion,

it would be an incredible boon

for our energy supply.'

Rep. Daniel Bosley,

D-North Adams

"It has become a bandwagon thing, and almost a religion," he said.

But wind power has gained mainstream support. State Rep. Daniel E. Bosley, D-North Adams, who was one of the architects of the state's electricity restructuring process in the 1990s, said he believes much of the criticism is overblown.

He said recent debates over the wind projects have demonstrated the need for new regulations to guide the process, as opponents have successfully delayed them for years.

"It should not take this long," Bosley said. "We allow people to continue to stall and stall and run the clock."

Clear guidelines needed

Clear guidelines also would help protect what is important.

"You don't want to see windmills on every vista in Berkshire County," he said. "In a controlled fashion it would be an

incredible boon for our energy supply."

That will become increasingly important as the demand for energy continues to outrun the supply.

"The reality is you're not going to be able to balance your energy portfolio on conservation," Bosley said. "The reality is you're going to have to do as much conservation as you can, and take care of whatever energy needs are left and those that are still growing."

Despite arguments over specific projects, wind power continues to enjoy strong support from national environmental groups.

"Local opposition is what we see, and on the national level there is support," said Laurie Jodziewicz, a specialist on the development and planning of new projects at the American Wind Energy Association in Washington, D.C. "When they get into actual sites, that's where there might be opposition arising."

Federal tax credits

AWEA predicts that 2005 will be a big year for new wind energy production, thanks to the renewal of a federal tax credit last year to encourage the development of new projects. The group estimates 2,000 new megawatts may begin generating this year, compared with 389 last year.

In Massachusetts, wind is poised for major growth, and much of that would take place in the Berkshires. In December, Gov. Mitt Romney, who described wind turbines as "not pretty," said he opposes the 130-turbine, $770 million Cape Wind project proposed for Nantucket Sound.

That project has bogged down in the face of high-powered opposition, ranging from Sen. Edward Kennedy to Walter Cronkite. Late last month, the federal Environmental Protection Agency ruled that the environmental review for the project was "inadequate," which may further delay the project.

Local control

But a spokesman for the governor said that while he opposed the Cape project, he would support similar projects in Western Massachusetts because they would be subject to local control.

"Unlike land, there is no zoning or other regulations to help guide industrial developments in the ocean," the spokeswoman said in December. "It's not the Berkshires versus the Cape, or Nantucket Sound. It's land versus ocean."

According to Tillinghast, if Cape Wind and other offshore projects fail, there would be tremendous pressure to put the turbines in the Berkshires, especially to keep pace with the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard, or RPS.

RPS is a part of Massachusetts' restructuring package, and requires that utilities provide a certain percentage of renewable power to consumers.

Retailers were required to make sure at least 1 percent of their supply was from renewables in 2003, with that percentage increasing by half a percent each year until 2009, and 1 percent per year after that. If they miss the target, which is 2 percent in 2005, they will have to make "alternative compliance payments" that likely would be passed on to consumers, Tillinghast said.

It was anticipated that utilities could purchase renewable energy credits from neighboring states, but Tillinghast said most of them will have trouble meeting their own renewable portfolio standards.

Using state statistics, she said it appears Massachusetts would need to install at least 484 new wind turbines to meet the RPS in 2009. Currently, there are only two wind projects operating in Massachusetts, in Hull and in

Princeton.

"I think we're really headed for a collision between fantasy and reality," Tillinghast said. "In the state rush to push renewable energy, the state is fast-tracking wind power plants without adequate environmental review."

She said the conservationist impulse to preserve land is not a selfish resistance to change, but an acknowledgment of "how quickly areas become industrialized or commercialized."

"It really is more about what do we want our legacy for the Berkshires to be," she said. "The Berkshires are recognized as a unique place, and if we cover our mountains with turbines, it will no longer be unusual."

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# Safety, health concerns about wind

March 14, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Section: Letters | 479 Words
OpenURL Link

To the Editor of THE EAGLE:

When I first heard of the Hoosac Wind project, I thought of the impact it would have on our view of our mountains. These wind turbines are very tall! In fact each turbine will be 340 feet tall, 35 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty! Nine 340-foot turbines on Crum Hill and 11 on Bakke will definitely dominate those ranges! (The turbines at Searsburg are only 190 feet tall -- 150 feet shorter than our turbines will be!)

But my primary concerns are more personal. What it will be like for those of us who live in very close proximity to the planned wind turbines? One of my big concerns is actually reinforced by John Zimmerman of enXco. That concern is for safety in winter.!

In July of 2003 Zimmerman, who managed the development of the Searsburg facility, told a reporter from the Calendonia Record, "There must be a safety radius of 750-1,000 feet around the wind turbines, because they may fling ice off in winter." However, in an e-mail to the American Wind Energy Association three years earlier (Jan. 20, 2000), he wrote, ". . . the danger from ice being released from rotor blades overhead is real -- and a hard hat is not going to provide you with much comfort . . . When there is heavy rime ice built up on the blades and the machines are running you instinctually want to stay away. They roar loudly and sound scary. Probably you would feel safe within the .5-mile danger zone however."

None of us on Tilda Hill Road will be a half mile or even a quarter mile from the turbines. We live right beside the Crum Range. And if the turbines are built above us, will I be able to safely enjoy my own property in winter like I can do now? Camera in hand, climbing the woodland to enjoy and photograph the lovely snow-robed evergreens and mysterious snowscapes?

The wind turbines' effect upon health and sleep is another serious personal concern. The British Telegraph in January of 2004 included an article by Catherine Milner who reported, "One survey found that all but one of 14 people living near the Bears Down wind farm at Padstown, Cornwall, where 16 turbines were put up two years ago, had experienced increased numbers of headaches, and 10 said they had problems sleeping and suffered from anxiety." Dr. (Amanda) Harry (a local general practitioner) said that it was caused by the inaudible low frequency noise from the turbines, which "could disturb rest and sleep at even very low levels."

Increased revenue is extremely attractive to small towns like Florida and Monroe. And I have family and neighbors who want the wind turbines to go up. I respect their views. But I have to express my own concerns. And pray that others will care that we all remain safe and well.

VERA KELTON

Florida, March 7, 2005

# Avoid windmill madness

March 10, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Clark H. Billings | Section: Columnists | 633 Words
OpenURL Link

Your March 8 editorial, "We like it windy" clearly demonstrates that the editor has windmills on his mind.

It also demonstrates that he has windmills in his mind.

Your focus was primarily on our dependency on foreign oil.

You assert that wind power is a "viable alternative."

Consider this. Wind power is only suitable for producing electricity -- when it produces anything at all. Its reliability is less than 30 percent.

Approximately 2.5 percent of the nation's electricity is produced by oil-fired plants. This means that even if wind power totally replaced oil as a mean of generating electricity, we would still have a 97.5 percent dependency on oil. About 67 percent of our oil use is in transportation, and unless you expect to put pinwheels on the tops of trains, planes, automobiles and trucks, we will still be dependent on oil -- both foreign and domestic.

Windmills simply will not and can not solve what you refer to as "the mess commonly referred to as Iraq ..." That is a specious argument and totally removed from the truth.

A 2.5 percent reduction in dependency is tantamount to no reduction at all. The smoker who smokes three packs of Marlboros a day and then, in order to reduce his dependency on nicotine, switches to three packs of Marlboro Lights a day has hardly reduced his dependency on nicotine. It might make him psychologically feel better -- but there hardly is a physical change.

If you want to feel good but accomplish nothing: Support wind power.

Take the subsidies and tax breaks away from the wind companies and put it into alternatives that reduce the 67 percent dependency on oil used in transportation.

You claim that there is "scant evidence to show that an entire species of bird or bat would be killed off with the building of a FEW (my caps) turbines." You are absolutely correct. However, what do you mean by "a few"?

The New England power grid has a production capacity in excess of 30,000 megawatts a day. How many wind turbines would it take to produce that amount of electricity if each turbine has the production capacity (when it is actually working) of 1.5 megawatts. It would take 20,000 turbines, and if clustered in 20-turbine wind factories, such as the Hoosac Wind Project, it would require the construction of 1,000 such wind factories. I suggest that that does not constitute "a few."

Your reporter, Ben Rubin, in his March 7 article on wind power asks the following questions and gives a definitive answer. "Do turbines vibrate the ground? No."

Maybe true, but they do emit low-frequency sound that can travel quite some distance. "Do turbines cast shadows on homes? No." What a moronic answer to assert that a structure the size of a 35-story building cannot cast a shadow. I'm only 6'3" tall (and shrinking), and even I cast a shadow. The "strobe-effect" of the turbine blades when the sun is directly behind or in front of the blades creates shadows that can be debilitating to humans and animals.

Article 97 of the Amendments to the Massachusetts Constitution reads as follows: "The people shall have a right to clean air and water, freedom from excessive and unnecessary noise, and the natural, scenic, historic, and esthetic qualities of the environment, and the protection of the people in these rights to the conservation, development and utilization of the agricultural, mineral, forest, water, air and other natural resources is hereby declared to be a public purpose."

Note: "natural." Are wind turbines "natural"?

I don't think so.

Wind power is the biggest scam since the chain letter (for money) or the "pyramid scheme." Don't buy into it!

You are being swindled! What's worse? You are advocating violation of the Massachusetts Constitution and raping the environment at the same time.

Clark H. Billings is a North Adams city councilor and professor at Massachusetts College of Liberal Arts.

# Wind, Power and Wilderness - The price of making clean energy on Florida Mountain

March 10, 2005 | Valley Advocate (Easthampton, MA)
Section: News | 4429 Words
OpenURL Link

John Pine was shivering. Outside the tent a light snow dusted the woods, but the temperatures weren't cold for these mountains. It was only October.

Ordinarily, John would have been plenty comfortable in his sleeping bag wearing only a T-shirt and shorts. But now he was sick, with a high fever and a deep, rumbling cough, utterly spent from laboring through the woods all day under a heavy pack. Even wearing several layers of clothing, heavy socks and a hat, he couldn't shake the chill.

Cozy in my own bag, I felt a twinge of guilt as I tossed around something he'd said earlier while we were all sitting around the campfire finishing supper. We'd been laughing, warmed by a few shots of whiskey, when our mood darkened and we grew silent. Maybe we were all tired, a little disappointed that the woods were wet and sullen.

"I hate to say it, fellas, " John had said quietly, "but this may be the last time we get to do this."

He didn't need to explain. Plans were already well under way to turn the top of Crum Hill, the 2,841-foot mountain peak in Florida, Mass. where we were camped, into a windmill farm. The developer, a big multi-national wind power company called enXco, Inc., had the blessing of a non-binding referendum by town residents overwhelmingly supporting the project, and significant state and federal incentives in the form of tax credits and direct subsidies worth millions. Through initial rounds of the permitting process, the company had a green light from the state Executive Office of Environmental Affairs and the public support of Governor Mitt Romney.

Unless something unexpected got in the way, it was only a matter of time before enXco would build roads up to the summit ridges of Crum -- called Florida Mountain locally -- and a neighboring peak, clearcut acres of forest and haul in truckloads of stone and concrete to make 20 individual platforms, each one to anchor a windmill reaching 340 feet in the air.

Since we'd first heard about the project, John had been adamantly opposed to it. "All to line somebody's pockets," he said, shaking his head. He didn't want to see it as a crucial step away from fossil fuels toward a clean, green, renewable source of energy. And it didn't matter, he said, that his family owned 140 acres of undeveloped land lower down the mountain. All his life, he'd regarded wilderness as something sacred, spiritual. He didn't want any mountain developed, not just the mountain in his own back yard.

As his friend of 20 years, I knew that John was dug into his position. I admired, even envied, his resolve. But I was not so certain. In fact, I didn't know exactly what I thought. I was trapped between my faith in the wisdom of protecting what's left of the wilderness and my faith in wind power as at least part of an answer to global warming and its potentially cataclysmic consequences.

As I lay in my sleeping bag, I thought how nice it would be if enXco simply found some place else to build its wind farm and left these mountains alone. It was impossible to set aside what my friends and I stood to lose when the windmills came.

There were four of us -- Dan Pidgeon, a 47-year-old college administrator, Troy Tompkins, a 42-year-old engineer, John, a 43-year-old owner of a spa maintenance company, and me. We had many adventures behind us and many future ones planned. As much as middle-aged men with jobs and families to look after can be, we were committed to enjoying life as outdoorsmen. We sometimes set our sights on farther, more famous locations than Crum Hill -- the White Mountains in New Hampshire, Moosehead Lake in Maine -- but we've returned together again and again over the years to this unspoiled jewel in the Hoosac range.

Located in the northwest corner of the state and part of an uninterrupted stretch of wilderness that includes beautiful state forests in Monroe and Savoy, the mountains in Florida provide habitat for an abundance of wildlife. Rich in water, these peaks feed brooks like the Dunbar, a fast-moving stream filled with native brook trout, that winds through miles of protected forest and flows into the Deerfield.

By the fire, after John uttered his gloomy prophecy, I'd searched the faces of our other two companions, waited for them to chime in. Ordinarily, Troy would have argued with John just for fun. Dan, in turn, would have needled Troy. But not this time. We just sat silent.

Before I finally nodded off, I sorted through the choices I'd eventually have to face. I could join John, steadfastly opposing the enXco project, but I'd be turning my back on an environmental movement with which I generally agree; or I could side with wind power advocates and choose to see the industrialization of Crum Hill, and probably other wild mountains throughout the country, as a necessary sacrifice to win a much larger war; or I could continue to suffer somewhere in between, too conflicted to take a position or lend a hand.

"The Hoosac Wind Power Project symbolizes the blossoming of an energy technology whose time has come," a statement on the company's Web site begins. "Wind is clean and endlessly renewable. It is the fastest source of new electricity in the world. And the breakthroughs wind power is achieving in public acceptance right here, in the mountain towns of Florida and Monroe, Massachusetts, may one day be seen as a flipping point in the dramatically new way our society thinks about how electricity should be made."

I'm ashamed to admit that I knew very little about wind power before enXco launched its proposal to build a 30-megawatt wind farm on Crum Hill. Since then, I've learned a great deal more -- from proponents and opponents not just of the Hoosac Wind project, but of wind power in general; from reports issued by regulatory agencies such as the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency; from literature describing the European experience with wind power; from information promulgated by the state office of Environmental Affairs during its review of the Hoosac Wind project and others, including a proposed offshore wind farm on Cape Cod; from reports prepared by non-profit groups, such as the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, that provide funding for wind power development; and from enXco, one of the world's largest and oldest wind power companies, with thousands of windmills operating on three continents.

On the one hand, my research has largely confirmed what I already believed: wind offers a clean, renewable alternative to traditional sources of energy. The statement on enXco's Hoosac Wind Web site, though written in somewhat flowery marketingspeak, doesn't seem far off in its assessment of wind power in general or of the significance of the project in Florida and Monroe.

On the other hand, the unassailable fact that "wind is clean and endlessly renewable"-- a fact that has led to growing public support for wind power -- does not begin to address important questions that arise both in the development of wind farms on a case-by-case basis and the broader effort to replace a sizable percentage of the nation's traditional energy production with wind power.

As of today, wind power supplies less than 1 percent of the country's demand for electricity -- a figure that nevertheless represents rapid growth in the last five years, due in large part to greater tax incentives and subsidies provided at the federal, state and local levels. The enXco project in the Berkshires is one of a dozen wind power projects now under way in New England, one of hundreds of projects planned across the country.

The federal government, through the Department of Energy (DOE), has a stated goal to increase wind power's share of the U.S. electricity market to 5 percent by 2025. If the country reached that goal -- the U.S. Energy Information Administration projects that, even with continued tax incentives and subsidies, wind power likely will account for little more than 1 percent in 20 years -- it would require more than a fivefold increase in the number of wind turbines already operating, from about 21,000 to well more than 100,000.

To date, the growth of wind power in New England has come in fits and starts, project by project, largely without the

guidance of broad energy master plans from the states. The siting of new wind farms similarly has followed a path of trial and error, regulated by existing zoning and environmental law, without specific rules for the wind power industry. If the industry grows to anywhere near the levels envisioned by the DOE, let alone to wind power advocates' optimistic goal of reaching 20 percent of the electricity market in the next two decades, it will result in massive industrialization of the landscape.

To put things in perspective, consider this: the Hoosac Wind project, based on its own figures, can supply electricity for approximately 9,000 homes with 20 wind turbines -- 1.5 megawatts each for a total of 30 megawatts. Critics of the project insist that enXco is inflating its figures, using best-case levels of output, but let's assume for now that its numbers are solid. How many wind towers will it take to produce electricity for 90,000 homes? Or 900,000 homes?

I recoiled when I first did the math, trying to imagine what the addition of, say, 20,000 wind towers throughout New England might look like. Even with refinements in turbine technology increasing efficiency, it will take a lot of windmills to offset even a small percentage of the electrical power generated by traditional methods. To equal the energy output of a single 500 megawatt natural gas-powered generator, which operates at an average of 75 percent of its rated capacity, it would take more than 1,000 windmills operating at the industry's best-case level of 40 percent capacity.

Next to the looming problem of global warming and the world's continued and growing consumption of fossil fuels, dramatic industrialization due to wind power might seem like a comparatively small price to pay. Nevertheless the issue of land use, it seems to me, is the biggest challenge the public will face as the wind power industry grows. It is also, I believe, the issue that gets the least amount of attention from the industry, the politicians, the regulators, and particularly wind power advocates within the environmentalist movement.

Though it remains a relatively small force in the current energy market, the wind power industry is experiencing a small boom right now. Though environmentalists have long advocated for greater research and development of wind power, along with other renewables such as solar and geothermal power, the industry has faced many obstacles, most notably stiff competition from traditional energy industries. Many of the traditional players -- oil, coal, gas, hydro-electric and nuclear -- benefited from sizable subsidies over the years and, through well-financed marketing campaigns and by virtue of their sheer size, came be viewed, fairly or unfairly, by government, the business sector and residential ratepayers as dependable and relatively inexpensive sources of power compared to what nascent renewable power industries could produce. Though the forecast for wind power has improved dramatically in recent years, it still faces intense competition from traditional power industries -- industries which also have grown quickly, not necessarily rationally, in the post-public utility era of deregulation.

The first time I saw a working windmill was on a trip to northern California more than a decade ago. In fact, I saw scores, maybe even hundreds of them. Ordered neatly in long rows along an interstate highway north of San Francisco, their imposition on the landscape wasn't exactly subtle, but admiring their compellingly symmetrical design, I found them beautiful. With no more than an intuitive sense that wind power offered a benign way to make electricity, I wondered how soon the nation might follow California's example and begin to wean itself of its reliance on traditional, non-renewable and far dirtier energy sources.

At nearly the same time that I was looking at California's energy-producing landscape with wonder, people locally began eyeing higher elevations in the Berkshires as a good site for windmills. The Hoosac Wind Web site provides the brief history: "Long before enXco's development team arrived on the scene, visionary planners in Florida and Monroe, Massachusetts had been exploring ways to develop the rich wind resource along the towns' high ridgelines. Twelve miles to the north, the wind farm at Searsburg [Vt.] was winning broad acceptance as New England's first utility-scale wind project. Why not in Florida and Monroe?

"Examining wind maps and making site visits years before, another development group identified the identical ridgelines as promising, but financing the project would prove impossible. Ten years later, circumstances would be entirely different. The timing was right; all participants shared the same vision; and with the involvement of enXco, a first-class developer with an international track record for success, financing was a certainty."

What changed in 10 years, in addition to the entry of an international player of enXco's caliber, was the political climate. If only to pay lip service to growing public concern about global warming and worldwide efforts to reduce ozone-depleting pollution, as in the Kyoto Treaty, political leaders at all levels of government began to pledge support for cleaner, renewable forms of energy.

At the federal level, incentives came in the form of tax breaks, including greatly accelerated depreciation of the capital costs of building wind farms and a Production Tax Credit worth $0.0018 per kilowatt hour.

In Massachusetts, the legislature set targets for the percentage of energy that comes from renewable sources, and provided a carrot-and-stick program based on what are known as "green tags," or Renewable Energy Credits; in effect, companies that don't produce renewable energy must purchase green tags -- to offset their non-renewable production -- from companies that do produce with renewables. The green tags can be bought and sold privately, and the market price for the credits rises and falls based on supply and demand. The program, which provides an additional revenue stream to renewable energy companies beyond the sale of electricity, is further strengthened by the state, through the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative (MTC), which agrees on a project-by-project basis to buy credits from renewable power suppliers at a guaranteed price.

"Many of these [renewable energy suppliers] wouldn't be able to produce enough revenue from the energy market to get financed and built," said Karlynn Cory, Strategy and Business Development Manager for MTC. "Renewables aren't quite price competitive -- they're almost there, but not quite. They needed RECs as an additional revenue stream in order to attract investors."

Critics of the Hoosac Wind project, such as Eleanor Tillinghast of Green Berkshires, a non-profit land preservation group in Great Barrington, argue that wind power is being artificially propped up with incentives and subsidies. "These corporations profit more from the tax benefits and government subsidies than from selling the wind-generated electricity," Tillinghast said. "The costs [of those incentives] are borne by the taxpayers and ratepayers."

Whether or not the costs are justified by even a modest reduction in the consumption of fossil fuels, the benefits to companies such as Hoosac Wind are indeed considerable. As part of its own mandated investment in green technology, the State of Connecticut paid for all the company's pre-development costs. (Since all electricity produced and consumed comes from what is known, in energy parlance, as the "New England Grid," the fact that Connecticut can't be assured that it will receive electricity actually generated by Hoosac Wind is a moot point.)

Hoosac Wind forecasts that the final price tag on its wind farm in Florida and Monroe will come in at $40 million -- all of which it can write off on its federal taxes within six years, half the time the IRS allows for the full depreciation of most capital assets, for a $14 million reduction in tax liability.

Once it begins making power, Hoosac Wind stands to receive more than $1.5 million annually in Production Tax Credits, based on its projected annual production of 84,000 megawatt hours. Based on the same projection, the company should begin receiving more than $4 million per year from the sale of state Renewable Energy Credits. Should the price of those credits fall, MTC has agreed to pay Hoosac Wind a guaranteed price of $17 million for its RECs over ten years. If the market price stays at current levels or increases, the value of Hoosac Wind's RECs for the next several years could be considerably higher, in which case, the company can sell credits privately in the early years and take advantage of MTC's guarantee later in the life of its wind farm.

At MTC, Karlynn Cory says that currently the demand for RECs is greater than the supply -- a situation that bodes fair to drive the market price upward. In addition to subsidies and price supports, Hoosac Wind will benefit from a corporate tax break extended by the state to wind power companies, allowing them to deduct 100 percent of all costs incurred in the installation of turbines.

The financial incentives in place to encourage the development of renewable energy production, according to the people I spoke to at MTC, are working, providing assurance to investors in bigger projects like Hoosac Wind while reducing the risk to smaller players -- companies and municipalities thinking of replacing gas or oil generators with a small windmill or two. Though New England has a long way to go in reducing its dependence on non-renewables,

they say, the energy market is becoming healthier and more diverse as a result of the state's commitment to renewables.

For Tillinghast, however, government incentives are working too well, attracting developers -- perhaps more importantly their investors -- to lucrative tax benefits more than to the opportunity to make and sell clean power. More than the tax breaks and subsidies themselves, Tillinghast says she's concerned about the political climate in which the incentives were born -- a political climate that, in the name of the environment, is tolerant of what strikes her as a particularly anti-environmental thing to do: destroy mountain wilderness to make a buck.

She says she started out favoring wind power, but Eleanor Tillinghast has come to see it mainly as a "big boondoggle." She is skeptical of the idea that the wind power industry is motivated in any way by a desire to help the environment. Moreover, in the case of the Hoosac Wind project, she fears that too many otherwise environmentally conscious people have been taken in by the mystique of wind power, too dazzled by the promise of renewable energy to bother challenging this project as they would any other form of industrial development in the mountains.

"I have to say, there's some real hypocrisy here," she said.

Tillinghast and her group have criticized the Hoosac Wind project mainly from two perspectives, one of which may matter more to ratepayers and taxpayers than environmentalists, while the other may matter a great deal to environmentalists and outdoor enthusiasts but fail to impress the average ratepayer.

For the benefit of consumers, for example, Green Berkshires provides analysis of the higher cost of producing wind power and the way those costs get passed along to ratepayers. For environmentalists, Tillinghast's group collects information about the risk windmills pose to migrating birds and bats, about the wetlands the Hoosac Wind project may disrupt, about noise pollution from windmills. Green Berkshires also weighs in on behalf of the region's stunning vistas, which the group believes will be damaged by the incursion.

There's another small but important audience that Green Berkshires would like to reach: the residents of Florida and Monroe, who voted in favor of the project the one time they were asked for their opinion. The group argues that property values around the project will fall -- a message usually heard from groups that fight development -- thanks in this case to the noise 20 whirling turbines will create.

EnXco, on its Hoosac Wind Web site, takes nearly every objection posed as a question, and provides a response. Here's what it says about property values:

"Is it true that wind farms have a negative effect on property values? According to a nation-wide survey of tax assessors in areas with wind power projects, the answer is 'No.' ... A newly released national study of 25,000 real estate sales has found no evidence of negative impacts on property values. In a majority of cases, properties that had a view of wind turbines appreciated in real estate value more quickly than nearby properties that did not have a view of the wind turbines, according to the study."

Here's what the study says about the impact of wind farms on the environment: "Every form of electric generation has an impact on the environment -- some far-reaching. For wind facilities, land must be cleared for roadways and turbine foundations. Since much of the cleared land is allowed to grow back, many of the impacts associated with construction are temporary. Studies at the Searsburg, Vermont wind farm identify no negative effects on migrating or nesting songbirds or on the movements of the local wildlife populations."

Point by point, the two sides engage in a virtual debate. In fact, betweengreenberkshires.org andhoosacwind.com, someone interested in the project can hear both sides of a debate that will likely continue long after the dispute over the development in Florida and Monroe is resolved. Strikingly, the two sides sometimes cite the same example, such as the European or Californian experience with wind power, to support diametrically opposite conclusions.

EnXco, a company with ties to the French government and a U.S. beachhead in Califonia, declares wind power a smashing success in those locales; Green Berkshires says it's a bust, with windmills being abandoned, the consumption of fossil fuels still unchecked and the skies filled with smog. The reality is probably somewhere in between.

That's the debate being held in the court of public opinion. Meanwhile, through state administrative courts, Tillinghast and her group have been challenging the project through the permitting process, attempting -- so far unsuccessfully -- to hold up the buildout and compel enXco to do more environmental investigation before it proceeds. Whether or not Green Berkshire succeeds in stopping the development, the legal challenge puts pressure on the company to do more to mitigate potential environmental damage.

Step away from the tit for tat and what's left are two equally reasonable, utterly conflicting goals: one to save wilderness in the Berkshires; the other to make clean, renewable energy in the Berkshires. Neither goal has to be achieved at the expense of the other, but neither can they both be realized.

Tillinghast looks past her immediate battle, envisioning a future in which the Appalachians from Maine to Georgia are dotted with thousands and thousands of windmills. Without adequate study or a regional plan for the siting of windmills, without environmental regulation specific to this rapidly growing industry, she said, "...we're running headlong toward a plan to industrialize our landscape. If any issue deserves a statewide and regionwide planning process, this one does."

Instead, she says, the government deregulated the energy industry to put market forces in the driver's seat, created an artificial market for wind power, and left small towns like those in the Berkshires to deal with big multi-national power companies on their own.

Though they disagree about the Hoosac Wind project, on the issue of better regional planning to guide the buildout of wind power, MTC's Cory and Tillinghast reach common ground.

"It's true the government has taken an piecemeal approach to regulating the development of wind turbines," Cory said. "I think having a master plan makes a lot of sense."

John was wrong. That October trip, when he was sick, was not our last visit to Florida Mountain. We've returned many times since, in all seasons, trying to soak up as much of the place as we can before it changes.

Like all big development projects, the Hoosac Wind project has crept forward slowly, inexorably. We were up on the mountain a few weeks ago for President's Day weekend, after a hard snow. The woods were silent and still except for the occasional pop of wood as trees complained about the sub-zero temperatures. At first the mountains seemed as wild as they always had. But soon we began to see small changes -- paths widened, trees blazed, some recent cutting on the west slope of Crum, signs of recent traffic at three wind testing towers which were erected in the summer of 2002.

This last trip, I thought a lot about what Florida Mountain looked like before enXco showed up. There were no visible signs of the planned development in the early spring of 2002, when we spent a few days exploring Spruce Mountain, a shapely 2,700 foot peak to the east of Crum. That had been a strange, beautiful trip marked by unseasonably hot weather and our discovery of endless piles of fresh moose scat on both summits. It was the beginning of April; the trees were only just threatening to bud. When we'd started out the first morning, there was still snow in the thickest spruce stands and on the north sides of the biggest boulders. But by midmorning, the temperature was 78 degree and rising.

Carrying light packs, we bushwacked for miles through dense woods. Except for a small network of snowmobile trails that converged at a pass between Crum's two summits, there were no trails, at least none made by humans. We followed a deer run down the east flank of Crum to a low, wet pass. Climbing up the steep west face of Spruce Mountain, we rose into a thick cloud of insects -- millions of dark olive and rust-flecked mayflies that had hatched in one of the trickling coldwater springs in the valley below.

On the top of Spruce we came to an outcropping of ledge, flanked by a sparse and improbable stand of spruce trees. As we gazed eastward to the summit of Monadnock, we were swarmed by flies. A sour smell hung in the air. Looking around, we saw pile after pile of droppings the size and color of toasted marshmallows. Large sections of low scrub brush were crushed and matted -- unmade beds in which moose had recently slept.

On that trip, we'd talked -- it seems ironic now -- all about global warming, prompted largely by the weirdly elevated temperatures. From the summit of Spruce, the land in every direction looked untamed and unspoiled, yet we knew appearances were deceiving. These vast forests were being nibbled at from the edges, disconnected by roads and industrial parks and housing subdivisions. The streams and lakes and ponds were being poisoned by acid rains, the delicate microclimates quickly altered by climatic change on a global scale.

I should have realized then that between wilderness and the comforts of civilization, modern people will tend to favor the latter. They may exploit it as benignly as they can, but in the end, they'll sacrifice wilderness before just about anything else. I'm not saying wind power is bad -- not at all. But the situation that is driving the development on Florida Mountain is nonetheless tragic.

# My windmill concerns are myriad

March 9, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Section: Letters | 850 Words
OpenURL Link

To the Transcript editor:

My name is Vera Kelton and I live on Tilda Hill Road in the town of Florida. Our home is at the base of the Crum Hill Range (some of it in Monroe) where nine of the 20 planned Hoosac Wind Project wind turbines will be sited. The site abuts our property.

When I first heard of the proposed project, I immediately thought of the impact it would have on our view of these mountains! And this is still a big concern as the turbines on the Crum Range will be visible both to our west and to our north.

I do not consider the turbines of themselves to be ugly. My concern is simply that these machines are very big and very tall. In fact each turbine will be 340 tall. That equals the height of a 34-story building. It is 35 feet taller than the Statue of Liberty!

And the turbines will be 248 feet taller than the Greylock Memorial, which is a mere 92 feet tall. And when you take anything that is very big and very tall and put about 10 of them in a row atop a mountain range something happens. The turbines cannot help but dominate the mountain range.

I have twice visited the Searsburg Vt., facility, which many refer to as a positive foretaste of the Hoosac Wind Project. But it really isn't. The turbines there are only 190 feet tall -- 150 feet shorter than our turbines will be. That's a big difference!

But my primary concern is much more physical. It involves what it will be like for those who just happen to live in very close proximity to the planned wind turbines.

It is interesting to me that while some folks trivialize or totally deny our concerns, one of my big concerns is actually reinforced by the writings of John Zimmerman of enXco, the company with a 40-year signed lease in hand and prepared to start construction this spring. That concern is one for our safety.

In July of 2003 Zimmerman told a reporter of the Calendonia Record, "There must be a safety radius of 750 to 1,000 feet around the wind turbines, because they may fling ice off in winter."

However, in an e-mail to the American Wind Energy Association three years earlier, Jan. 20, 2000, about ice throw at Searsburg, he wrote, "Boeing and/or Hamilton Standard did some work to determine how far we must stay away from the ski trails to be safe from ice being thrown from their turbines ... without going back to dig up those papers, and if I remember correctly, the distance was between .25 and .5 miles away, downwind. It's a function of blade tip speed, so applicable to present day turbines too."

He continues, "While the Boeing study was academic, the danger from ice being released from rotor blades overhead is real, and a hard hat is not going to provide you with much comfort ... when there is heavy rime ice built up on the blades and the machines are running you instinctually want to stay away. They roar loudly and sound scary. Probably you would feel safe within the .5 mile danger zone, however."

Wow! Feel safe with a half mile danger zone. None of us on Tilda Hill Road will be a half-mile or even a quarter mile from the turbines! We live right beside the Crum Range. And this is not a wind farm opponent speaking; this is someone who was managing the Searsburg, Vt., facility. So yes, I am very concerned about ice throw.

The effect on health and sleep is another serious personal concern. A British newspaper (the Telegraph) in 2004 included an article by Catherine Milner who reported, "One survey ... found that all but one of 14 people living near the Bears Down wind farm at Padstown, Cornwall, where 16 turbines were put up two years ago, had experienced increased numbers of headaches, and 10 said they had problems sleeping and suffered from anxiety."

Other people have reported other problems as well (cell phone and TV interference for example, strobing effect from lights at night, and disturbance from noise), but my main concerns are the ones I have high-lighted: safety and health.

When the original vote was held in the town of Florida in May 2003 to empower the selectmen to go ahead with an agreement with enXco, a majority said yes. But 47 of the 170 voters said no. That's not just a handful of people who had concerns. And many still have concerns whether or not they signed both of the ensuing appeals, which particularly addressed environmental concerns.

Yet it is true, at present, we are still a minority. But minorities do have the right to express their views and follow all their options (including legal appeals) and pray that along the way more of those who hold the controlling majority voice will begin to care about their concerns.

Because, if something is not good for the health and safety of some of the townspeople, is it really that good for the town in general? Is there no sense of being "Our Brother's Keeper?"

I yet hope there is.

Vera Kelton

Florida

March 7

# We like it windy

March 8, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Section: Editorials | 671 Words
OpenURL Link

Blessed are those who see things in black and white. A person who sees the world in this way would look at the contentious question of wind power and have a very clear answer as to which the wind turbines could be. They would be good, or bad, with no questioning at all.

However, we here at the Transcript aren't like that. We're not seeing black or white with this one. We're seeing a big, gray blob. With that being said, we're still leaning toward supporting wind power projects in our area.

There's simply no disputing that oil's a planet killer -- whether you're talking about environmental damage from spills, to carbon dioxide, to all-out war -- and it will run out at some point. It's kind of like saying that the food at such-and-such restaurant is poisonous, and that the portions are also too small.

And there's wind power as a viable alternative. It doesn't produce any carbon dioxide, and as long as there's a breeze, there's energy to be made.

Whether it damages the environment or not is an issue unto itself, and in that debatable question is the crux of the matter for many people, a sticking point for which neither side wants to give any ground.

One group says that using wind turbines to harness energy protects the environment from potential disasters from nuclear power plants, does away with excess carbon in our atmosphere and reduces dependence on foreign oil.

The other group says that wind turbines can be devastating to avian groups whose migratory routes are often blocked by silent and deadly turbine blades. There's also the flora and fauna that gets tromped on when construction and maintenance of these towers gets under way. Case in point is the native golden rod that's growing in Florida and Monroe, future home of the Hoosac Wind project.

However, while we can see both sides of the gray issue, we're not altogether torn.

We don't buy that going green will kill the economy. That's an excuse best left to Republican spinmeisters who don't realize that without a planet to capitalize on, there is no economy.

Are turbines unsightly? That, as they say, is in the eye of the beholder. We think they happen to look good.

As for massive animal kills, some scientists will say that extinction is a perfectly natural process, but they stop short of saying that it's OK for humans to propel the extinction of other animal and plant groups. We certainly don't want any species wiped out without having been given its due, humankind included. However, there's scant evidence to show that an entire species of bird or bat would be killed off with the building of a few turbines.

There's also another very pressing need to consider, as mentioned, the dependence on foreign sources of energy. Were the United States not so dependence on Middle Eastern oil, we wouldn't be in the mess commonly referred to as Iraq right now. That in itself seems reason enough to begin looking at alternative sources of energy, with the caveat that the "alternative" source is transitioned into being much more of a primary source in the future.

Nuclear power is definitely out, as well. The future of nuclear power equals one thing: a big mess. When human error gets mixed into the equation, the picture gets even darker.

For the record, we haven't given up on solar power, either. The same thing goes for hydrogen fuel cells. The jury's

still out, however, on Fryolator oil.

As you may have read in our paper, wind power is working its way into the Northern Berkshires and we're all watching the future unfurl as these towers spring up along the ridgelines.

For now, as far as the Transcript is concerned, we're not looking at wind power as the world's saving grace, or the devil's handiwork for that matter. Rather, it's the best thing we've got going right now.

Wind turbines, unlike oil, won't lead to our extinction, and that's our primary concern as we throw our weight behind wind power.

# Future of N. County energy blows in the wind

March 7, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript | Section: Today's Headlines | 1481 Words
OpenURL Link

Searsburg, Vt., might be viewed as any sleepy, bucolic, 100-person town were it not for the enormous, spinning wind turbines it has perched on Mount Waldo -- looking like pinwheels on steroids, or a striking post-modern art exhibit of 11 massive robo-flowers.

And unlike "Where's Waldo?", these things can be spotted from more than six miles away.

Those who live in the area seem altogether blasé about the turbines, probably since they've lived around them since 1997.

"Personally, I don't see them anymore," said Town Clerk Josephine Kilbride. "It's like looking at telephone poles, you know, you just don't notice." Her home is one of the closest to the turbines.

Kilbride's assessment might seem strange since the turbines can seem so eye-catching, with whirling, huge, sharp-looking black blades atop a stark 132-foot white tower that dwarfs all area trees.

Resident James Hazell lives just around the bend from the wind farm, about a mile and a half from them. He cannot see the turbines from his home and said he never hears them. He said the turbines have had no direct impact on his life, but he said he's glad green energy is being produced in his town.

"Some people say, 'Oh, it's going to destroy the beauty of Vermont. Big deal," he said. "I'd rather have these big mills than have to drill into the ground or have another nuclear plant. It's a better alternative."

Keeping it clean

Kilbride said most of the town likes the wind farm, because it creates "clean energy for our children and grandchildren."

Nationally, wind energy is the fastest growing form of energy production and stands as the only renewable energy with the cost, technology and efficiency to compete with fossil fuels, said Greg Watson, vice president of the state-run Massachusetts Tech-nology Collaborative. Harnessing power straight out of the air, California has built thousands of turbines and Texas is exploding in new wind projects, he said.

Internationally, Europe has built the most turbines to date, with Germany already accounting for 10 percent of its energy consumption in renewables, mostly wind.

As a wind revolution comes into full swing, the Berkshires now faces the potential of wind energy. The most notable regional plan is the Hoosac Wind project, a 20-turbine project slated for Florida and Monroe, proposed by California-based wind company enXco. The project faces strident opposition from some Florida residents, regional activists and the environmental nonprofit Green Berkshires, which is hoping to protect the local undeveloped mountain ranges. The wind farm also has strong backing from the Florida community.

Other projects are being considered for Savoy, New Ashford and Lenox, and over the border in Readsboro, Vt., within the national forest.

On the other side of the state, the Cape Wind project proposes a much larger project of 130 wind turbines over 24 miles off the coast of Cape Cod. About 55 percent of area residents oppose the plan, along with almost all local

government officials, including Gov. Mitt Romney -- saying it is inappropriate and too large for the area.

Taking sides

However, a question looms: Is wind right for you?

Answering this question can be arduous, as a mountain of information and misinformation surrounds the new, complex technology.

On the good side, wind energy produces no emissions; it's energy source is free and limitless and the technology is safe and proven. The potential for hi-tech, construction and manufacturing job creation is also a strong pro for the new industry, said Watson.

Communities that bring in wind projects can receive significant economic benefits, as Searsburg netted more than $110,000 last year in property taxes. Still, Kilbride said much of that money needed to be sent to the state for education under Vermont's education funding process, and the amount the town could keep was $45,500.

Florida is expected to receive more than $150,000 a year if the turbines go up.

Most energy experts said that renewable energies without conservation is solving only half the problem. Wind projects in Europe are two to three times more useful because Europeans on a whole consume far less energy that Americans. Only throwing more energy into the grid, even if it is green energy, is not the answer. The problem must be attacked on two fronts -- conservation and green energy -- to make a real impact, experts said.

Paul Gipe, a California author, advocate and critic on wind energy, has written four books on the subject and worked in the wind industry for more than 25 years. He said the three major problems brought up about wind energy are: noise, visibility and bird and bat deaths.

To the bat cave

First, Gipe said turbines are audible, but the noise they emit isn't painfully pervasive. In Searsburg, right up against a turbine, the sound is like a big washing machine -- a rhythmic whooshing with a gentle hum. About 100 yards away from the turbines, only the empty howl of the wind can be heard.

What some people don't know, Gipe said, is that the sound of a turbine can travel farther distances in certain atmospheric conditions -- such as down a valley. Does this mean a turbine on Florida mountain could be heard in downtown North Adams? The answer is probably no. The sound is soft enough to be drowned out by the wind most of the time, said Watson.

Next, the issue of visibility is what really wrangles those against turbines. Some might say wind farms are ugly, others find them elegant. Because of the size and height of a turbine (which technology continues to make bigger and bigger), someone is probably bound to see one no matter where it is built. It brings up the new phrase of the "view shed" -- the area where a turbine can be seen.

Even if a home is in a turbine's view shed, Watson said, "There's not been one case where property value has declined around wind turbines. They've either stayed the same or gone up."

Economically speaking, Sears-burg only profited with a little more tourism because of the turbines. Economies could be negatively affected by the Cape Wind project, though, where about 130 Statue of Liberty-size turbines could take up the center of a major tourist hub, said Audra Parker of the Alliance to Protect Nantucket Sound.

Beauty is most unequivocally in the eye of the beholder when it comes to the subject of visibility. For instance, Hull has a single turbine in the middle of town, not miles away in the mountains. Watson said an interesting phenomenon occurs where once people have turbines in their area, the acceptance level for them jumps up,

probably because the mystery of them is diffused.

Lastly, the fact is that wind turbines kill birds and bats, said Gipe.

Yet given the size of the projects proposed in the region, Gipe said, "Seven wind turbines aren't going to kill a lot of birds and bats, period."

Watson said that today's turbines spin much more slowly than previous versions, thanks to more advanced gearing systems in the turbines. This feature reduces bird and bat deaths to an almost negligible amount, he said, even along migratory routes. The most important issue is ensuring that the cumulative effect of several projects in one region aren't all killing too many animals and that exotic or endangered birds aren't at risk from nearby turbines, said Gipe.

Many other issues surrounding turbines can be more easily deciphered, exp-erts say.

Do turbines vibrate the ground? No. Do turbines cast shadows on homes? No. Do turbines have an adverse affect on wildlife and vegetation? No, especially when wind companies work hard to reduce the footprint of a project.

Are turbines inefficient and don't create much energy for their size? No, and the technology continues to improve almost daily to make turbines more and more effective. Is the government unfairly subsidizing wind energy? Considering the fact that coal, oil and natural gas are much more heavily subsidized, the lesser incentives given to wind energy only help to level the playing field, said Watson.

The fact that greener good can come from wind power means that oftentimes the turbine debate leaves environmentalists fighting environmentalists -- some siding with the development of renewable energies, others siding with protecting natural beauty and battling against development -- maybe others siding with both.

Dick Andrews, field representative for Vermont environmental non-profit Forest Watch, said, "There's conflicting values here. Wind energy is a renewable energy and it holds to potential to reduce greenhouse gasses and curbing global warming. That's good for forests. So, we have to think about more than the local impact of machinery."

So, is wind energy the right answer in this area? The answer isn't simply yes or no, given that the turbines themselves are neither monstrous nor completely unnoticeable. The answer -- something for a community to decide together after considering the facts -- seems to be blowing in the wind.

# Long and short of wind power

February 26, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Lauren R. Stevens | Section: Other Opinions | 819 Words
OpenURL Link

STAMFORD, VT.

SKIING WITH a friend up the Birch Brook Trail to the Taconic Crest the other day, we paused for a breath and looked out. I've heard stories about how blue the sky is in other parts of the world, but that morning nowhere's skies could have been bluer. The air was so clear we could pick out details on far-off ridges.

These are the conditions that should be normal, but already aren't.

Few days roll by, especially in the summer, without haze. We have read or see what has happened in some of this country's glorious national parks, where visibility has been cut drastically. Even here, our views have been obscured. Because it has been happening relatively slowly or because we don't get out that often, we may not notice declining air quality -- unless we happen to suffer from asthma, or know someone who does.

That's why those who argue that wind turbines will mar our environment are taking a short-term view. Better to see a few wind turbines than no ridges at all. The haze is low-level ozone, derived from fossil fuel combustion, some of it from locally operated automobiles and some of it from the production of electricity nearer and farther away.

But to see short-term is also to miss the big picture, which is global warming. The Kyoto treaty went into effect Feb. 16, with the U.S. conspicuously AWOL. It is therefore up to American states, cities, towns and individuals to act on the major environmental problem of our time.

That same fossil fuel combustion emits gasses that collect in the stratosphere, forming a barrier to the release of earth's heat.

Globally the 10 hottest years since records have been kept have occurred since 1990, with 2004 the warmest year ever. An ice shelf the size of Rhode Island broke off the Antarctic content in 2002. No one doubts that the earth is heating up; virtually all scientists agree that human activities are the cause. Extreme weather is plaguing the world, whether the heat in Europe blamed for 26,000 deaths in 2003 or the forest fires that destroyed acreage the size of Maryland in Alaska last summer.

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People say, especially on subzero mornings, a bit warmer weather in New England won't hurt. It does. Even non-skiers may admire our sugar maples and the autumn color they bring to the landscape. While some animals, like birds, can follow the cold north, trees can't pick up their roots. They die. Furthermore, what about those critters that are moving our way, termites or other pests for example, and some diseases, from which our cool weather has shielded us?

More to the point than our convenience are such matters as mass relocation of humanity from coastal areas due to rising sea levels. Or the destruction wrought by super intense storms. Or we may be concerned at the lengths to which this country will go, including war, to preserve supplies of oil.

We owe it to ourselves and to the greater world we hope to serve to do what we can to combat pollution in general and global warming in particular. The best two things we can do are rein in our use of automobiles and conserve energy at home. Without doing those two things, nothing else we do has meaning. For example, if we simply increase our use of electricity because of new, renewable sources, we will get no where. Switching to renewables is

the third most important thing we can do.

We are fortunate to live in an area where wind is an available resource. Wind turbines must be properly sited. Environmental organizations throughout New England have come together to draw up siting guidelines. The question is not, how many birds were killed in California or how many bats in West Virginia; but what would happen here? Because good siting is important, both to residents and to wind developers, the Berkshire ridges are not going to be chock-a-block with turbine towers. And there are some places that should not -- and will not -- have them, such as Mount Greylock.

The amount of power we generate in Berkshire will be limited, compared to the immensity of the problem, but it is what we can do. Furthermore, the Hoosac Wind project by itself would provide five percent of Berkshire County's needs. Not trivial. Of course the electrons aren't labeled and delivered to specific addresses, but what if the Berkshire area hosted wind turbines capable of providing 10 percent of the area's use? The projects currently under consideration would make that goal, which would be exciting for us and an example to other areas.

The issue is controversial; witness the editorial pages of this newspaper. Some people are more charmed by sleek wind machines than are others. Yet those anti-turbine environmentalists who seem bent on ridge preservation to the exclusion of other issues may be missing the forest for the trees.

# Turbine project picks up wind

February 22, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript | Section: Local Headlines | 798 Words
OpenURL Link

FLORIDA -- The Hoosac Wind project team captured a small victory in the midst of a long-standing battle with a group of residents and environmentalists now that a hearing on the project will be expedited.

The state Department of Environmental Protection approved expediting a hearing for the appeal of the project, in a Feb. 14 letter on to one of Hoosac Wind's attorneys, Gregor I. McGregor. The hearing will be in front of the independent state adjudicatory body, the Division of Administrative Law Appeals. The hearing process was requested to be completed by April 1 by the company proposing the project, California-based wind company enXco.

"This is good news. Of course, the ultimate good news is the positive decision to go forward, which we expect by April 1," said Hoosac Wind spokesman Sam Bittman.

Appellants' spokeswoman Eleanor Tillinghast said she was not surprised by the DEP decision to expedite.

"The state government has been rushing this project through without adequate environmental review and we fully expect to go to Superior Court," Tillinghast said.

DEP spokesman Edmund Coletta said approval to an expedite a hearing is quite rare, only happening about three to five times a year throughout the whole state. Essentially, expediting sends a case into the fast lane, allowing it to skip the regular queue and receive top priority for hearings and a decision.

The $40-million wind project plans to build 20 turbines on Bakke Mountain in Florida and Crum Hill in Monroe, producing 30 megawatts of energy.

The project has been appealed twice by a group of 10 Florida residents, both times on the grounds of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, saying construction would damage wetlands in the proposed building area. The petitioners are being represented by Green Berkshires, a nonprofit environmental group based in Great Barrington. Green Berkshires is also publicly opposing most, if not all, other wind projects slated for the Berkshires.

On Jan. 25, representatives and attorneys for the appellants, enXco and the town of Florida held a prescreening conference in a last attempt to settle the dispute before the case would go before DALA. That conference failed to reach an agreement.

Bittman said an April 1 decision will keep the project on track for completion by the end of the year. He said this timeline is essential to ensure the project receives a significant federal tax incentive for new renewable energy sources. Eligibility for the tax incentive closes off at the end of the year.

The potential for another appeal to a higher court, however, could very well throw a wrench in those plans.

Pamela D. Harvey of the Counsel to the Commissioner of the DEP wrote the decision, concluding that the project fit the status to expedite for three different reasons.

First, the project "supports a substantial public interest" by providing renewable energy, diversifying the power supply, "improving environmental quality by reducing air pollution" and increasing energy security, Harvey wrote.

Second, a letter of support to expedite from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative weighed in on the decision. The collaborative is a public agency focused on greener economic growth and a reduction of the state's

dependence on fossil fuels through new renewable energies. The agency also manages the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust Fund.

About the collaborative, Bittman said, "They have been an ally to begin with."

Third, Harvey factored in the production tax credit, a federal tax deductible program that provides renewable energy developers 1.8 cents per kilowatt hour generated for the next 10 years. The incentive was created to encourage renewable energy programs. To be eligible for the program, the Hoosac Wind project must be up and running by Dec. 31 at the latest.

Additionally, the appellants' request to designate the wind project "major and complex" under the commissioner's directive on time limits and timelines for adjudicatory appeals was denied by DEP. Coletta said the decision was made because the issues raised by the appellants in regard to wetlands problems were rather common.

"The identified issues arise routinely in wetlands cases, and do not appear to merit a designation of 'major and complex,'" wrote Harvey.

According to the state DEP Web site, a "major and complex" designation would exempt the case from mandatory timeline rules, and would be given a personalized timeline.

The Web site states, "major and complex" projects are designated because of the "the complexity or novelty of the issues, magnitude of the project, potential for environmental harm or benefit, Constitutional considerations or other relevant consideration."

Harvey said she wanted to emphasis that both decisions neither reduces the thoroughness of the hearing or "implies any prejudgment."

To that, Tillinghast said, "We believe that the state government have been biased toward [Hoosac Wind] throughout the environmental review,"

She said Green Berkshires was prepared to show DALA the environmental evidence that has not been reviewed yet by the state, and -- if needed -- show the same information to the state Superior Court in a third appeal.

# We'll take the windmills

February 21, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Section: Editorials | 334 Words
OpenURL Link

It is true that Governor Mitt Romney has applied a double standard in opposing windmills in Nantucket Sound and fast-tracking the Hoosac Wind project in the Berkshires. It is also true that Florida Mountain will not look the same after the windmills are built. But the age of cheap oil is over, while our society's need for energy will go on and on. No doubt the environmental group Green Berkshires would join The Eagle in adamant opposition to the siting of another nuclear plant anywhere near here, and in our concern about acid rain, global warming and the health effects of being downwind of coal plants in the Ohio Valley. The effects of windmills are strictly local, while the alternatives pose a more global threat to the environment. Windmills contribute modestly to the energy grid, but every bit helps. The Eagle will take the windmills and a clean energy future, and suggest to the environmentalists that they ought to figure out what they are for, not just what they are against.

What this country is all about

Everyone is entitled to their own opinion of the work of playwright Tony Kushner, and to the war policies of the Bush administration he attacks in his new play "Only We Who Guard the Mystery Shall Be Unhappy." But to suggest, as does North Adams City Councilor William Donovan, that a reading of this "anti-war, anti-American propaganda piece," has no place in a public school is downright un-American. In a free society, it is usually the artists, rarely the politicians, who challenge citizens to think critically about actions that are taken in their name. Nobody forced the audience of 200 to sit through the play. They saw several fine actors give what by all accounts was a spirited reading of a challenging play, and then they grappled with the issues it raised in discussions afterwards. What better use of a public building than to educate the public through art? That, as Adams Selectman Edward Driscoll pointed out, is "what this country is all about."



- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  'We'll take the windmills', *Berkshire Eagle, The* (online), 21 Feb 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/108693C4A3C9D9BE›

# Hoosac windmills on permit fast-track

February 18, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: Headlines | 817 Words
OpenURL Link

State regulators have agreed to speed up an appeal against the environmental conditions placed on the Hoosac Wind power project proposed for the North Berkshire hilltown of Florida and nearby Monroe in Franklin County, saying the appeal process should be completed by April.

If the developers successfully withstand the challenge, construction of the 20-turbine project could begin in May, and the project could be up and running by the end of the year.

But opponents of the wind power development say it is a flawed and politicized process, and vow that if their appeal fails they will take their case to the courts.

'Rush to judgment'

"I am not surprised," said Eleanor Tillinghast, of the environmental group Green Berkshires, which is opposing the project. "We expected that because this has become such a political process, with pressure from the governor's office, that there would be a rush to judgment."

The roughly $40 million Hoosac Wind project is being proposed by developer enXco, and would en-tail the construction of 11 320-foot turbines on Florida's Bakke Mountain and another nine on Crum Hill in Monroe.

A group of 10 Florida residents and another 28 Berkshire County residents are appealing the Department of Environmental Protection's "superseding order of conditions" for the project, which was issued last fall to minimize the environmental impacts of the project.

On Jan. 25, the two sides were unable to reach a compromise on the conditions, and the matter was forwarded to the state's Division of Administrative Law Appeals, which will hold a hearing in Bos-ton and issue a final ruling.

Expedited process

Hoosac Wind requested an expedited process, and in a letter to its attorneys dated Feb. 14, DEP counsel Pamela D. Harvey agreed. "The project supports a substantial public interest by providing a source of renewable energy, consistent with the commonwealth's goals for energy development," she wrote.

She also noted that while Hoosac Wind is proposed by a private developer, it is has earned the support of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, the public agency that administers the state's Renewable Energy Trust Fund.

Meanwhile, the opponents had requested that the project should be designated as "major and complex," which would require a more thorough process. But Harvey wrote that the issues in the Hoosac Wind case were no different from any other wetlands protection issue.

"While the permitting of wind energy projects may raise important public concerns and novel issues, the case before the department is limited to whether the project meets the standards under the Wetlands Protection Act," she wrote.

She also wrote that neither decision "diminishes the thoroughness of the hearing process nor implies any prejudgment of the substantive issues raised by the appeal."

Tax credit expiring

Hoosac Wind spokesman Sam Bittman said part of the reason the developers asked for the expedited process was because "delaying the project would negatively affect the project."

In particular, he noted that the federal renewable energy production tax credit -- a major incentive in getting such projects off the ground -- was renewed only through 2005, and its renewal could be delayed.

He said the first phase -- building roads to the sites -- could probably begin in late May.

"If we can get going and there are no other obstacles, the plan is a five- to six-month [construction] schedule that would have the plant running by the end of 2005," he said.

Tillinghast said the decision is not a surprise, considering that DEP is part of the Romney administration, and the governor has made it clear he supports putting wind power in the western part of the state.

"We expected this throughout," she said. "We're facing the Rom-ney administration, which is doing everything it can to oppose wind projects offshore, and everything it can to promote them in the Berkshires.

"It's a totally hypocritical position," she continued. "If anything, there is more wind offshore and the economies of scale are better offshore. This is not about logic, this is about politics."

Tillinghast said the next step after the administrative review would be to take the issue to Superior Court.

'Huge' consequences

"The environmental consequences of this are huge," she said. "You have state agencies that will go through endless environmental reviews for tiny projects, but you get to something that involves four miles of new roads, crossing more than 11 streams, filling in wetlands, impacting birds and bats, fragmenting habitats, and the Romney administration is closing its eyes."

Yesterday's decision comes as news emerged that a smaller, seven-turbine wind power facility could be heading to Savoy.

Harold Malloy, who owns land along Harwood Road and Barnard Road, has signed a letter of intent with a Waltham-based wind developer to lease 293 acres for three years for potential construction at the site.

Minuteman Wind LLC would build the turbines contingent upon a feasibility study and the approval of local and state boards of review.

The North Adams Transcript contributed to this article. Christopher Marcisz can be reached at cmarcisz@berkshireeagle.com or at (413) 664-4995.

# Wind is part of the solution

February 18, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Section: Letters | 405 Words
OpenURL Link

To the Editor of THE EAGLE:

In debating energy issues, an underlying fallacy is often made by those who would minimize relatively modest measures. They label them as virtually useless if they don't individually solve a major portion of the problem.

This is particularly self-defeating when the problem, like oil dependence or global warming, is so immense that it will require hundreds of measures -- both on the conservation/efficiency side and the production/generation side. If we reject each one because it individually is insufficient, we'll never make the multitude of "dents" that, collectively, could alleviate much of the problem.

In his to the editor of Feb. 2, Clark Billings, trivialized the contribution that the Hoosac Wind Project could make towards satisfying energy needs. Rather than describing it as a percentage of the electrical needs for all of New England, as he does, it would be more apt and useful do to so from a local perspective. For the towns of Florida and Monroe, Hoosac Wind would generate 20 times the electricity needed by all its households. If one were to account for the "implied" commercial and industrial consumption of those households (the electricity required to make and deliver all of their consumer items and for the schools, hospitals, municipal and others services they depend on) the electrical output would still exceed the needs of the two towns by 7 to 1.

These calculations are based on average household usage. They also assume the 30 percent capacity factor for the wind turbines used by Mr. Billings, less 10 percent for the average losses between power plants and customers.

Incidentally, in his letter, Mr. Billings ascribes 100 percent capacity operation to the rest of the New England power grid. The fact is that year-round usage tends to average only around 55-60 percent of peak, and peak in turn is usually only 85 percent of available capacity, so that the 30,000 MW in the grid operate at a year-round average of only around 15,000 MW, not 30,000. So his bottom line is off by a factor of two.

The significant bottom line, however, is that with the Hoosac Wind Project, the towns of Florida and Monroe would be meeting an important challenge. They would generate more than enough clean electricity to offset all the coal, oil and atomic power that they consume. And they would also be helping their neighbors to meet this worthy goal.

THOMAS H. STOKES

Stockbridge, Feb. 4, 2005

# Turbine project picks up wind

February 18, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript | Section: Today's Headlines | 806 Words
OpenURL Link

FLORIDA -- The Hoosac Wind project team captured a small victory in the midst of a long-standing battle with a group of residents and environmentalists now that a hearing on the project will be expedited.

The state Department of Environmental Protection approved expediting a hearing for the appeal of the project, in a Feb. 14 letter on to one of Hoosac Wind's attorneys, Gregor I. McGregor. The hearing will be in front of the independent state adjudicatory body, the Division of Administrative Law Appeals. The hearing process was requested to be completed by April 1 by the company proposing the project, California-based wind company enXco.

"This is good news. Of course, the ultimate good news is the positive decision to go forward, which we expect by April 1," said Hoosac Wind spokesman Sam Bittman.

Appellants' spokeswoman Eleanor Tillinghast said she was not surprised by the DEP decision to expedite.

"The state government has been rushing this project through without adequate environmental review and we fully expect to go to Superior Court," Tillinghast said.

DEP spokesman Edmund Coletta said approval to an expedite a hearing is quite rare, only happening about three to five times a year throughout the whole state. Essentially, expediting sends a case into the fast lane, allowing it to skip the regular queue and receive top priority for hearings and a decision.

The $40-million wind project plans to build 20 turbines on Bakke Mountain in Florida and Crum Hill in Monroe, producing 30 megawatts of energy.

The project has been appealed twice by a group of 10 Florida residents, both times on the grounds of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act, saying construction would damage wetlands in the proposed building area. The petitioners are being represented by Green Berkshires, a nonprofit environmental group based in Great Barrington. Green Berkshires is also publicly opposing most, if not all, other wind projects slated for the Berkshires.

On Jan. 25, representatives and attorneys for the appellants, enXco and the town of Florida held a prescreening conference in a last attempt to settle the dispute before the case would go before DALA. That conference failed to reach an agreement.

Bittman said an April 1 decision will keep the project on track for completion by the end of the year. He said this timeline is essential to ensure the project receives a significant federal tax incentive for new renewable energy sources. Eligibility for the tax incentive closes off at the end of the year.

The potential for another appeal to a higher court, however, could very well throw a wrench in those plans.

Fit to be expedited

Pamela D. Harvey of the Counsel to the Commissioner of the DEP wrote the decision, concluding that the project fit the status to expedite for three different reasons.

First, the project "supports a substantial public interest" by providing renewable energy, diversifying the power supply, "improving environmental quality by reducing air pollution" and increasing energy security, Harvey wrote.

Second, a letter of support to expedite from the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative weighed in on the decision. The collaborative is a public agency focused on greener economic growth and a reduction of the state's dependence on fossil fuels through new renewable energies. The agency also manages the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust Fund.

About the collaborative, Bittman said, "They have been an ally to begin with."

Third, Harvey factored in the production tax credit, a federal tax deductible program that provides renewable energy developers 1.8 cents per kilowatt hour generated for the next 10 years. The incentive was created to encourage renewable energy programs. To be eligible for the program, the Hoosac Wind project must be up and running by Dec. 31 at the latest.

Additionally, the appellants' request to designate the wind project "major and complex" under the commissioner's directive on time limits and timelines for adjudicatory appeals was denied by DEP. Coletta said the decision was made because the issues raised by the appellants in regard to wetlands problems were rather common.

"The identified issues arise routinely in wetlands cases, and do not appear to merit a designation of 'major and complex,'" wrote Harvey.

According to the state DEP Web site, a "major and complex" designation would exempt the case from mandatory timeline rules, and would be given a personalized timeline.

Not 'major,' or 'complex'

The Web site states, "major and complex" projects are designated because of the "the complexity or novelty of the issues, magnitude of the project, potential for environmental harm or benefit, Constitutional considerations or other relevant consideration."

Harvey said she wanted to emphasis that both decisions neither reduces the thoroughness of the hearing or "implies any prejudgment."

To that, Tillinghast said, "We believe that the state government have been biased toward [Hoosac Wind] throughout the environmental review,"

She said Green Berkshires was prepared to show DALA the environmental evidence that has not been reviewed yet by the state, and -- if needed -- show the same information to the state Superior Court in a third appeal.

# Readsboro wind project is on hold

February 15, 2005 | Brattleboro Reformer (VT)
Author: BEN RUBIN North Adams Transcript | Section: City & Town | 484 Words
OpenURL Link

READSBORO -- The Deerfield Wind project will be delayed indefinitely by its project developer, the California-based wind company enXco.

EnXco spokesman Sam Bittman said the company is halting its plans in Readsboro as enXco re-evaluates and re-prioritizes all its current wind projects in the United States. Bittman said the company wants to prioritize the projects most likely to go online in 2005 to become eligible for the federal Production Energy Tax Credit.

The federal program is a tax deductible that provides renewable energy developers 1.8 cents per kilowatt hour generated for the next 10 years. The program's cutoff date is at the end of 2005, said Bittman.

John Zimmerman, Hoosac Wind and Deerfield Wind project manager, said enXco plans to have 300 megawatts of wind energy, most in the West and Midwest, installed before the program expires.

One of the high priority projects planned for completion in 2005 includes the Monroe, Mass., and Florida, Mass., Hoosac Wind project, Zimmerman said.

The Hoosac Wind project is undergoing an appeal in front of an independent state adjudicatory commission, forwarded by a few Florida residents who are against the project.

Because the Deerfield Wind project was announced only a month ago, it will be put on the back-burner to allow financial and human resources to go to other projects slated for 2005, Bittman said. Zimmerman said enXco is still committed to the Deerfield Wind project, even with the delay.

The tax credit program was initiated to "level the playing field with fossil fuel producers" and give incentive to renewable energy providers to creating new projects, Bittman said.

The Deerfield Wind project already went through a screening process and was on its way to the filing of a notice of intent at the federal level. A notice of intent starts a lengthy process of the U.S. Forest Service researching an environmental impact statement and gathering public comment about the project.

Instead of beginning this process, enXco requested the filing of the notice of intent be held off for now, effectively stopping all progress for the project.

The Deerfield Wind project proposes 20 to 30 wind turbines in the Green Mountain National Forest, which could produce 30 to 40 megawatts of electricity -- enough power for 10,000 to 13,000 homes. The 320- to 350-foot turbines would sit on the ridge-lines in the forest area, along Route 8.

Part of the project will be an extension of the 11-turbine Searsburg Wind project already built, but will have larger turbines than the 200-foot towers in Searsburg.

Green Mountain is part of the National Forest system, and the enXco application requests cutting 80 acres of forest.

Bob Bayer, Green Mountain project coordinator, said the 80 acres should be less than proposed when final blueprints are created, and the building area proposed is only along the ridge-lines, not in a large swath of forest-area. Four miles in access roads would also be built for the turbine construction and upkeep.

- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  BEN RUBIN North Adams Transcript, 'Readsboro wind project is on hold', *Brattleboro Reformer* (online), 15 Feb 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/10849AF41C5F159F›

# Company delaying Readsboro wind project

February 11, 2005 | Times Argus, The (Barre-Montpelier VT)
Author: Associated Press | Section: NEWS | 292 Words
OpenURL Link

READSBORO - A local wind project planned by a California company is being delayed indefinitely. EnXco is re-evaluating its Deerfield Wind project as it decides which of its projects across the country would be most likely to go online this year and become eligible for the federal Production Energy Tax Credit, said company spokesman Sam Bittman. The federal program is a tax break that provides renewable energy developers 1.8 cents per kilowatt hour generated for the next 10 years. The program's cutoff date is at the end of 2005, said Bittman. John Zimmerman, Hoosac Wind and Deerfield Wind project manager, said enXco plans to have 300 megawatts of wind energy, most in the West and Midwest, installed before the program expires. One of the high priority projects planned for completion in 2005 includes the Monroe, Mass., and Florida, Mass., Hoosac Wind project, Zimmerman said. The Hoosac Wind project is undergoing an appeal in front of an independent state commission, forwarded by a number of local Massachusetts residents who are against the project. Because the Deerfield Wind project was announced only a month ago, it will be put on the back-burner to allow financial and human resources to go to other projects slated for 2005, Bittman said. Zimmerman said enXco is still committed to the Deerfield Wind project, even with the delay. The Deerfield Wind project proposes 20 to 30 wind turbines in the Green Mountain National Forest, which could produce 30 to 40 megawatts of electricity - enough power for 10,000 to 13,000 homes. The 320- to 350-foot turbines would sit on the ridge-lines in the forest area, along Route 8. Part of the project will be an extension of the 11-turbine Searsburg Wind project already built, but will have larger turbines than the 200-foot towers in Searsburg.

# Local wind project on hold

February 10, 2005 | Bennington Banner (VT)
Author: BEN RUBIN North Adams Transcript | Section: Today's Headlines | 413 Words
OpenURL Link

READSBORO -- The Deerfield Wind project will be delayed indefinitely by its project developer, the California-based wind company enXco.

EnXco spokesman Sam Bittman said the company is halting its plans in Readsboro as enXco re-evaluates and re-prioritizes all its current wind projects in the United States. Bittman said the company wants to prioritize the projects most likely to go online in 2005 to become eligible for the federal Production Energy Tax Credit.

The federal program is a tax deductible that provides renewable energy developers 1.8 cents per kilowatt hour generated for the next 10 years. The program's cutoff date is at the end of 2005, said Bittman.

John Zimmerman, Hoosac Wind and Deerfield Wind project manager, said enXco plans to have 300 megawatts of wind energy, most in the West and Midwest, installed before the program expires. One of the high priority projects planned for completion in 2005 includes the Monroe, Mass., and Florida, Mass., Hoosac Wind project, Zimmerman said.

The Hoosac Wind project is undergoing an appeal in front of an independent state adjudicatory commission, forwarded by a few Florida residents who are against the project.

Because the Deerfield Wind project was announced only a month ago, it will be put on the back-burner to allow financial and human resources to go to other projects slated for 2005, Bittman said. Zimmerman said enXco is still committed to the Deerfield Wind project, even with the delay.

The tax credit program was initiated to "level the playing field with fossil fuel producers" and give incentive to renewable energy providers to creating new projects, Bittman said.

The Deerfield Wind project already went through a screening process and was on its way to the filing of a notice of intent at the federal level. A notice of intent starts a lengthy process of the U.S. Forest Service researching an environmental impact statement and gathering public comment about the project.

Instead of beginning this process, enXco requested the filing of the notice of intent be held off for now, effectively stopping all progress for the project.

The Deerfield Wind project proposes 20 to 30 wind turbines in the Green Mountain National Forest, which could produce 30 to 40 megawatts of electricity - enough power for 10,000 to 13,000 homes. The 320- to 350-foot turbines would sit on the ridge-lines in the forest area, along Route 8.

Part of the project will be an extension of the 11-turbine Searsburg Wind project already built, but will have larger turbines than the 200-foot towers in Searsburg.

# Readsboro wind project is on hold

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READSBORO, Vt. -- The Deerfield Wind project will be delayed indefinitely by its project developer, the California-based wind company enXco.

EnXco spokesman Sam Bittman said the company is halting its plans in Readsboro as enXco re-evaluates and re-prioritizes all its current wind projects in the United States. Bittman said the company wants to prioritize the projects most likely to go online in 2005 to become eligible for the federal Production Energy Tax Credit.

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Green Mountain is part of the National Forest system, and the enXco application requests cutting 80 acres of forest.

Bob Bayer, Green Mountain project coordinator, said the 80 acres should be less than proposed when final blueprints are created, and the building area proposed is only along the ridge-lines, not in a large swath of forest-area. Four miles in access roads would also be built for the turbine construction and upkeep.

- **Citation (aglc Style)**
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