Wind project appealed

August 17, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Erik Arvidson, Transcript Statehouse Bureau | Section: Today's Headlines | 783 Words
OpenURL Link

BOSTON -- A Pittsfield civil engineer on Tuesday testified against a proposed 20-turbine wind power project in the town of Florida, saying it would likely harm wetlands in the vicinity of the ridge where the turbines were planned.

James Scalise, president and owner of SK Design Group, said he did not think the developer of the Hoosac Wind Power project, California-based enXco, had an adequate plan to prevent erosion and storm-water runoff into streams over which project officials plan to build an access road.

Access roads

Project officials said their plan meets all the conditions required by the state Department of Environmental Protection, which granted a permit for the project.

The state Division of Administrative Law Appeals is considering an appeal by Green Berkshires Inc., a group of opponents of the wind project, who want the DEP's permit rescinded.

The DEP ruled that Hoosac Wind's project plans were sufficient to protect the wetlands around the site on Bakke Mountain in Florida and Crum Hill in Monroe.

20 wind turbines

In total, 20 wind turbines are planned on the two ridges, for a project cost of $40 million.

Scalise, who was hired as an expert by Green Berkshires to review the project, said it would require an "enormous" piece of excavating equipment to build the abutments to support the stream crossings.

Under questioning from the attorney for Green Berkshires, Robert Lucido of Pittsfield, Scalise said it was likely that contractors would have to use a 20-ton hoe-ram vehicle to remove boulders around the stream bed.

'Aggressive methods'

"These aggressive methods have a high potential for altering the resources nearby," Scalise said. "There is no way to predict exactly what will happen, but to say there would be zero impact would be idealistic."

He estimated that the excavation machine would have to be 18 feet long and 12 feet wide; "I'm concerned that you would remove a connected root system that would tear away the edge of the stream bank."

The contractor would likely build a temporary timber bridge over the stream, and Scalise said that left the potential of the stream sediment being stirred up and fish and other aquatic life being disturbed.

Scalise also criticized Hoosac Wind's proposal for a construction yard, which would be outside the so-called "buffer zone" around the wetlands but which would still create a potential for water runoff into the streams.

He described the gravel yard as an area where "the vegetation would be removed and replaced with gravel material for staging equipment."

In addition, Scalise estimated that the contractor would have to transport about 30,000 yards of fill material to the

site in 10-wheel dump trucks traveling on gravel roads. That equated to about 1,200 truckloads of fill being driven onto the site, he estimated.

Proponents have said the construction of roads for the project will affect 3,900 square feet of bordering vegetated wetlands and 375 feet of stream bank, which will cross nine streams that run intermittently. Project officials said all of the affected areas will be replaced.

Scalise was cross-examined by the attorney for enXco, Gregory McGregor, and the DEP's chief legal counsel, Robert Bell. McGregor pointed out to Scalise that the DEP's "superseding order of conditions" for the project, which is the order being appealed by Green Berkshires, prohibited the use of equipment inside the streams' beds or on their banks.

Erosion control

McGregor said DEP's order mandated erosion-control methods to be installed prior to any work being done around the streams.

In addition, he said the project calls for "open-bottom culverts" under stream crossings, which allow for wildlife to pass through, and which is a design preferred by state and federal regulatory agencies.

Sam Bittman, a spokesman for enXco, said after the hearing that the DEP only approved the project after "spending months reviewing the engineering plans for building access roads up to the ridge."

Months reviewing plan

Bittman added, "Our position is what [DEP's] is: Yes, there will be an impact, and you are disturbing a certain amount of land. But we are providing stream crossings that use state-of-the-art technologies. We put together a plan that does minimize the negative impact on the site."

Bittman said the plan also calls for the vegetation around the access roads to come back partially. The developers will still be required to get vehicles up the ridge to maintain the turbines, he said.

Natalie Monroe, an administrative magistrate, is expected to take up to three days of testimony from both sides this week. The Division of Administrative Law Appeals is an independent body which reviews appeals of decisions by some 20 state agencies.

It's not clear when Monroe will issue a decision, but Bittman said project officials are hoping for one by this fall.

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Clean-energy laggards

August 7, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Editorial | Section: Editorials | 591 Words
OpenURL Link

Two Eagle stories on August 1 were reminders of both the perils of global warming and a solution to it. "Global warming may be making storms more intense" was the headline over a report on an MIT climatologist's contention that the earth's atmosphere and oceans are heating up so fast that tropical storms are now more ferocious than ever -- previous forecasts were for killer storms 50 years in the near future -- and they're only going to get worse.

Some researchers disagreed with Kerry Emanuel's most dire conclusions, which were based on studying actual storms rather than computer models. But few of Mr. Emanuel's critics doubted the overall trend, which is toward planetary heating from fossil-fuel emissions, and climatic shifts that will cause violent weather, disrupted agriculture, rampaging tropical diseases and inundated coastal areas. Testifying before a Senate subcommittee last month, the new head of the National Academy of Sciences, Ralph Cicerone, said a 2004 Pentagon report predicting that whole sections of Europe would be "unlivable" by 2020 sounded plausible to him.

Another August 1 Eagle story was headlined "Wind site developers resist further testing." Hoosac Wind, which plans to build a 20-turbine wind farm in Florida, wants a green light from state agencies despite calls for more study from the Berkshire Natural Resources Council and five other environmental groups concerned about potential harm to bats and birds. The more-testing demand sounds like a traditional stalling tactic, for previous research in Southern Vermont has shown that bird and bat harm from mountain turbines is minimal in this region.

The BNRC is right that care must be taken in siting and building wind farms. But with the monumental ravages of global warming looming, this is no time to let the perfect be the enemy of the good. That's especially true for the Cape Wind project proposed for Nantucket Sound, a mammoth scheme that would supply power for three quarters of Cape Cod and the islands and significantly reduce carbon-dioxide emissions in New England.

Only about 2 percent of U.S. energy is now generated by renewable sources such as wind, and the namby-pamby energy bill passed in Washington last month won't boost that figure by much. Included in the bill were some incentives for developing clean-coal technologies and bio-fuels. But 80 percent of the bill went to subsidies and tax breaks for oil, coal and gas companies that are already reaping record profits, as well as weakened environmental rules for drilling on public land. Gas-hog car-mileage standards remained unchanged, and tax incentives for hybrid cars were modest. The bill's priorities were exactly backwards from what they should have been.

The United States wouldn't be at the mercy of the likes of the House of Saud if not for its addiction to foreign oil. The energy bill does nothing to force the country in oil rehab, however, meaning that blood will be continue to be shed for the oil needed to fuel gas-guzzlers and enrich the energy corporations that fill Republican campaign coffers every election cycle.

As the world's biggest producer of greenhouse gases dawdles -- with President George W. Bush again rejecting mandatory curbs on emissions last month -- some unlikely countries are getting the global-warming message. China, long a heedless polluter, is investing heavily in wind farms and aims to meet 10 percent of its energy needs from renewable sources by 2020. Interestingly, China first became intrigued by wind farming 18 years ago when a delegation visited a turbine installation in Utah. Perhaps Mr. Bush should take a look at clean-energy production in the Beehive State, and the BNRC might consider looking around, too.

- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Editorial, 'Clean-energy laggards', *Berkshire Eagle, The* (online), 7 Aug 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-

view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/10BDA46C67D3EC40›

Clean-energy laggards

August 6, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Editorial | Section: Editorials | 591 Words
OpenURL Link

Two Eagle stories on August 1 were reminders of both the perils of global warming and a solution to it. "Global warming may be making storms more intense" was the headline over a report on an MIT climatologist's contention that the earth's atmosphere and oceans are heating up so fast that tropical storms are now more ferocious than ever -- previous forecasts were for killer storms 50 years in the near future -- and they're only going to get worse.

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  Editorial, 'Clean-energy laggards', *Berkshire Eagle, The* (online), 6 Aug 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-

view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/10BD481AD82D06A0›

Bird, bat, windmill advocates to meet

August 5, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Nicole Sequino, Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: Berkshire Eagle | 641 Words
OpenURL Link

FLORIDA -- The state Executive Office of Environmental Affairs will begin a dialogue among environmental groups, wind power consultants and state officials in the next few weeks, primarily to discuss the need for bird and bat studies at future wind power facilities such as the Hoosac Wind project.

In an e-mail, Air Police Director David W. Cash asked officials to convene during the week of Aug. 15 to "identify opportunities and needs for statewide or regional avian/bat studies and to discuss standards for site-specific avian/bat assessments."

"While we encountered broad support for the development of environmentally appropriate wind energy," Cash stated, "there is some confusion about the proper level of wildlife assessment that should be required for wind facilities. We would like to convene an experts meeting this month to help address and clarify this issue."

Cash's response follows recent prodding by six environmental groups to require comprehensive bird and bat studies at future wind sites in the state.

In a July 15 letter, the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, the Environmental League of Massachusetts, the Nature Conservancy, the Sierra Club and the Trustees of Reservations asked Cash to establish this requirement for the 20-turbine Hoosac Wind project in the towns of Florida and Monroe. The Massachusetts Audubon Society sent a separate letter.

BNRC president Theodore "Tad" Ames said he is pleased that Cash acknowledged their concerns for thorough studies of bird and bat populations at wind farm sites.

"The state isn't saying exactly what it's going to do," Ames added, "but it is recognizing that some sort of framework needs to be in place, and that's a start."

Ames said the environmental groups are seeking the studies as a precautionary measure.

"We think the studies are prudent so that we're not siting facilities in an excessively bird- and bat-populated area," he said. "It's more like looking before you cross the street."

Hoosac Wind spokesman Sam Bittman said that enXco, the California-based developer of the $40 million project, has been working with the state on aviary studies. He explained that enXco received a Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act permit in the fall of 2003 with the condition that it hire experts to study bird and bat populations before construction.

With that in mind, a technical advisory group consisting of state officials, Hoosac Wind representatives and bird experts has overseen migration and habitat studies on birds and likely will conduct a radar study on bats next spring, Bittman said.

With regard to the state meeting, Bittman said Cash is doing his job as a public servant by bringing multiple experts together for a discussion.

EnXco aims to build 11 turbines on the Hoosac Range in Florida and nine on Crum Hill in Monroe. The turbines, standing 340 feet tall, would generate a total of up to 30 megawatts of electricity.

Bittman has cited studies suggesting that wind turbines have little impact on avian and bat species. In Vermont, a 2004 fall study on enXco's Searsburg Wind project revealed that 96 percent, or 178 birds, flew higher than 375 feet.

Curry & Kerlinger, the private consultants who conducted the study, also found no bird carcasses at the Vermont wind farm, but fewer native birds were heard singing near the site because of the 11 turbines.

In response, BNRC land conservation director Narain Schroeder pointed to another study supported by the Royal Society for the Protection of Birds and BirdLife International in September 2003. That study stated that bird deaths at wind farms probably are underestimated, largely because of predators and scavengers that quickly consume the bird carcasses after collisions.

"I think a lot of those carcasses are removed quicker by predators than we realize," Schroeder said. "Predators are learning that this is a feeding ground for them. A lot of studies also show that birds avoid the area after a wind farm is built, and you're going to miss that without an in-depth assessment of bird and bat populations."

- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Nicole Sequino, Berkshire Eagle Staff, 'Bird, bat, windmill advocates to meet', *Berkshire Eagle, The* (online), 5 Aug 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/10BCF4B014EDB250›

Go slow on wind site approval

August 5, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Letters | Section: Letters to the Editor | 426 Words
OpenURL Link

To the Editor of THE EAGLE:

The article in July 31 Eagle article "Wind site developers resist further testing" needs some clarification.

First, every site is different, with different characteristics of topography and location. Hoosac Wind is proposed for a sharp north-south ridge, with 11 340-foot high turbines spread along one mile of ridge. Searsburg is in a pass with several small hills around it, and its towers are under 200 feet. What was found at Searsburg has nothing to do with Hoosac Ridge.

According to Kerlinger's study of Searsburg, he says the taller the tower, the more bird kills. Add lightning and mortality increases. Add a foggy September night and disaster can strike. No kills were found at Searsburg, as far as they know. But Searsburg is not lighted and are quite short. Hoosac will be 340 feet tall and lighted.

As far as I know, no bat studies were done at Searsburg, so how do we know that bat kills do not happen in this part of the country as Mr. Bittman states? We certainly do not know what happens over Hoosac Ridge. In West Virginia over 2,000 bats were killed in one season at the Mountaineer site by turbines of similar size.

Small birds -- songbirds, shorebirds migrate from 300-2,000 feet altitude. We don't know whether they may use the ridge for direction and wind uplift. We do know that raptors -- eagles and hawks -- use the ridge. More than 1,000 passed over the ridge in September and October 2004, according to a study done for the developers. Raptors migrate during the day so can see the towers, but they need to come do to rest and feed.

A breeding bird study was done in 2003 but these birds do not get into the heights of the turbines. However it was shown at Searsburg that their breeding populations were down. Also that hawks avoided the whole area.

What the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative asked for was:

1. Fall songbird and bat migration using radar and Thermal infrared camera (for 2004). 2. A Spring songbird and bat study. 3. Fall raptor study (this was done in fall 2004). The first two have not been done.

Tad Ames of the Berkshire Natural Resources Council is right; there should be state-wide regulations and required studies for all wind projects. Sites that are in major migration areas should be eliminated.

Let's take the time to find out the impacts before the construction. What's the rush? The wind will always be there.

PAMELA B. WEATHERBEE

Williamstown, Aug. 2, 2005

The writer is a botanist.

- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Letters, 'Go slow on wind site approval', *Berkshire Eagle, The* (online), 5 Aug 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/10BCF3AFA2A67BC0›

Wind project studies under way

July 27, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript | Section: Today's Headlines | 587 Words
OpenURL Link

NORTH ADAMS -- While six environmental groups are asking state officials for comprehensive bird and bat studies for the Hoosac Wind Project, a project spokesman said those studies already are under way.

"Doing both preconstruction and postconstruction studies are part of our MEPA [Massa-chusetts Environmental Policy Act] permit," said Hoosac Wind spokesman Sam Bittman.

He said extensive studies are going on through the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, with environmental and state groups helping to direct the scope of the studies.

The $40 million Hoosac Wind Project, proposed by California-based company enXco, would build 20 wind turbines on Bakke Mountain in Florida and Crum Hill in Monroe that will produce 30 megawatts of energy.

The Berkshire Natural Resource Council, the Massachusetts Sierra Club, the Environmental League of Massachusetts, the Nature Conservancy and the Trustees of Reservations sent a letter about studies to the state Executive Office of Environmental Affairs on July 15.

The letter was addressed to Director of Air Policy David Cash and requested a "rigorous pre-construction avian study" be done on the site. The request was to set a precedent for all other state wind projects and potentially establish a state policy requiring comprehensive bird and bat studies for wind farms, the letter stated.

Berkshire Natural Resources Council President Theodore "Tad" Ames said, "We want to do every bit of due diligence that we can do, and I think enXco hasn't done that. ... Any responsible environmentalist should be comfortable knowing all the facts before the project goes up."

Sierra Club state chapter President James McCaffrey said an extensive preconstruction project could avert major accidents, such as the many bird deaths in California and bat deaths on the East Coast already caused by other wind farms. Both the Sierra Club and Berkshire Natural Resources Council said they are pro-wind energy but want to make sure any project goes through the proper reviews for environmental impacts.

He added, "We need to know what's going on at the site proposed. We wrote to the [EOEA] to say, 'Let's do this right.' ... What this is calling for is what [the Sierra Club] is calling for everywhere."

Flying high?

"We are very much in favor of studies being made before and after construction and we very much want to have our project built and have those avian and bat studies," said Bittman, adding that "These are groups that have concerns with avian and bat life, and so do we."

He said a bird migration study using radar was completed in the fall of 2004 at enXco's Searsburg (Vt.) Wind project, an 11-turbine farm built in 1997. The study found that 96 percent of the birds assessed -- 178 total -- flew above 375 feet; the highest turbine in Florida will be 340 feet, he said. The study was conducted by a company from Cheyenne, Wyo., that was hired by enXco.

The Hoosac Wind Project was slated to start construction in the spring, but was delayed because of appeals on wetlands issues by a local environmental group and abutters of the site. A court hearing for the most recent appeal will be held in Boston from Aug. 16 to 18. After that, the state department overseeing the case, the Division of

Administrative Law Appeals, has 30 to 60 days to make a ruling, said Bittman.

Hoosac Wind also received a permit last month from Massachusetts Fish and Wildlife's Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program to conserve the endangered large leaf goldenrod. The company will relocate many of the plants away from the project's proposed road and replant them elsewhere, said Bittman.

Tilting at Windmills - As their numbers grow, a surprising voice has come out against them

June 10, 2005 | Daily Hampshire Gazette [30 Day Embargo] (Northampton, MA)
Section: Feature | 4588 Words
Page: 26
OpenURL Link

Kevin Gutting

A turbine at the Searsburg, Vt., wind farm west of Brattleboro cuts a dramatic profile against the sky. The cost of producing electricity with wind has dropped considerably in the last 10 years, and advocates say the industry is poised for rapid growth in the United States. But opponents say wind farms produce minuscule amounts of power and are artificially propped up by subsidies.

Kevin Gutting

At left, Martha Staskus, a wind energy consultant from Waterbury, Vt., leads a tour of the Searsburg site last month. She's joined by, in foreground, Walt Congdon, a retired science teacher and wind-power advocate from the Northfield Mount Hermon School, who is a volunteer guide at the site. Both say wind power is vital for combating global warming.

Kevin Gutting

The Searsburg site as seen from Route 9 in southern Vermont. Though few residents in the area appear to object to the turbines, some are alarmed by a proposed expansion of the site that could add 25 to 30 new-generation turbines, which are substantially larger than the existing ones.

Kevin Gutting

Staskus says much research goes into finding suitable sites for wind farms. For example, the shape of these trees at the Searsburg site, with the bulk of the branches to one side, shows that the wind blows consistently from the northwest. Wind farms must also be located near highways and existing transmission lines.

Kevin Gutting

Close-up of a Searsburg turbine. Sensors in the rotor hub track wind speed and direction, and a computer at the base of the turbine tower in turn moves the turbine's blades to maximize energy production.

Kevin Gutting

The substation at the Searsburg site, owned by the Green Mountain Power Co. of Brattleboro. Wind power opponents say wind farms produce little energy but take up much space; one critic says a 1,000-megawatt wind farm, the equivalent of a medium-sized conventional power plant, would occupy 2,000 square miles.

Barbara Ostrowska

Vera Kelton, a Florida resident who opposes the Hoosac Wind Power Project lives behind a site called Crum Hill, where turbines will be built that will stand at least twice as high as the wind-measuring tower seen on the ridge behind her. Kelton says she and her husband, who own 62 acres nearby, want "to pass that on to our children and grandchildren. We see it as a place of beauty, not a setting for a wind farm."

On a ridgeline in southern Vermont, the spring wind is blowing hard, clearing most of the early-morning clouds from

a bright blue sky ' and providing a continual source of power for eight turbines that jut above the treeline, their three-pointed blades spinning away.

With their white steel towers and dark, fiberglass rotor blades, the nearly 200-foot high turbines are a striking sight against the forest. They're hardly benign structures ' the spinning, 65-foot-long blades make a constant whooshing noise, while various grinding and bumping sounds come from the towers ' but there's still something graceful about them, an appealing line to their symmetry.

Perhaps the appeal lies partly in the knowledge that these modern windmills are making electricity in the same way people once harnessed the wind to grind flour or pump water from the ground. Martha Staskus, a wind energy consultant who's leading a half dozen people on a tour of the Searsburg, Vt., facility, about 25 miles west of Brattleboro, is waxing enthusiastic about just that.

"The great thing about wind power is that the fuel is free," says Staskus, who helped develop the Searsburg project and now assists in monitoring it. "You don't have to drill for it or mine it or transport it. It's already here, and it's endless.

"And best of all," adds Staskus, "it doesn't pollute."

It's a compelling argument, given strong evidence that the world's climate is heating up from the burning of fossil fuels for power plants and automobiles, and that higher global temperatures might ultimately turn farmland to dust, swamp coastlines with rising seas, and decimate forests. Wind power, advocates say, is on the threshold of dramatic growth in the United States as the need for more renewable energy becomes clear.

As the Web site for enXco, a multinational wind power company planning to build a facility in the northern Berkshires, puts it, wind power represents "the blossoming of an energy technology whose time has come."

BUT WHAT HAS ALSO come is a growing backlash against wind power, one that says it's more flash than substance ' an energy source that produces negligible amounts of electricity (less than 1 percent of current use in the United States) yet takes up tremendous space, whether on mountaintops, in farming areas or along shorelines, in the process transforming scenic landscapes into industrial vistas.

Some large-scale wind farms have also been blamed for thousands upon thousands of bird deaths, once prompting a Sierra Club employee to refer to turbines as "Cuisinarts of the sky" (the environmental group acknowledges the remark but says it has long supported individual wind projects "developed and operated in an environmentally responsible manner").

And, critics contend, wind power is underwritten by such generous federal and state grants and tax incentives that the only people truly benefiting from it are the developers, as well as the companies manufacturing the equipment and the people leasing private land for turbine use.

The debate is dividing the environmental community, as people who value land preservation lock horns with those who say some sacrifice is necessary to fight air pollution and climate change. It's raising difficult questions about personal environmental responsibility, community independence and the tradeoffs inherent in any form of energy production.

In Vermont, where the Searsburg facility represents the largest wind farm in the Northeast, several other proposed wind projects are generating considerable controversy. The same debate, on a smaller scale, is now taking place in Massachusetts, concerning both a huge wind farm proposed off Nantucket and ' to a lesser degree ' enXco's Hoosac Wind Power Project, a $40 million, 20-turbine wind farm to be built in the tiny towns of Florida and Monroe.

Similar arguments are now heard elsewhere in the country and in parts of Europe, where wind farms of 100-plus turbines have become a significant energy source but are now viewed by some as eyesores that have had little effect in offsetting power plant emissions.

But Staskus, who lives in Waterbury, Vt., is one of many proponents who say most criticism of the industry is off the mark. She says wind energy has a vital role to play in today's world ' and that more people favor it than oppose it. She notes that the Hoosac Wind Power Project has won the support of substantial majorities of residents in Florida and Monroe.

"A lot of it comes down to NIMBYism," Staskus says, referring to people's desires to see turbines somewhere other than in their own communities ' Not In My Back Yard, in other words. "Most people know that wind power is important and that when you look at the complete picture, the pluses far outweigh the minuses."

Eleanor Tillinghast, director of the environmental group Green Berkshires, based in Great Barrington, couldn't disagree more. An opponent of Hoosac Wind and similar facilities planned in the Berkshires, she fears the state, in attempting to meet a goal of getting 4 percent of its energy from renewable resources by 2009, is trying to fast track wind farms in the region. Towns have no regulations or basic blueprint for dealing with wind farms, she says, and are ill-equipped to negotiate with big developers like enXco.

To Tillinghast, wind power is simply a flawed technology ' one that, in the name of saving the environment, could devastate Massachusetts uplands by clear-cutting acres of forests to make way for turbines and their infrastructure: roads, transmission lines and substations.

Reducing fossil fuel use is a vital goal, she agrees. But it could be much more readily achieved, she says, "through modest improvements in energy conservation. That's what we should push for. Instead we're talking about covering ridgelines with enormous turbines. Why?"

IN THE UNITED STATES, efforts to use wind for electricity date back to the late 19th and early 20th centuries, when a number of small-scale turbines were built, primarily as experiments or to provide power for farms off the electric grid. But after the oil crisis of 1973, the federal government began looking at ways wind power could be used for larger applications, both residential and commercial.

Research has ebbed and flowed over the years, dictated by government funding and the fluctuation in prices for conventional energy sources like coal. But by most measurements, the industry has come a long way, even if the amount of power it produces is still a tiny part of the country's energy mix.

For instance, most of the turbines developed in the 1970s and 1980s produced anywhere from 25 to 350 kilowatts of electricity, whereas many machines coming on line today produce 1.5 megawatts, according to the U.S. Department of Energy. Some newer designs, primarily made in Europe, produce 2.5 and 3 megawatts.

Meantime, the average cost of producing electricity through wind has dropped from over 80 cents per kilowatt hour in 1980 to between 4 and 6 cents today, the DOE says. According to the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA), a national trade group based in Washington, D.C., there are over 6,400 wind projects ' commercial, residential and municipal ' operating or planned in the United States.

The AWEA says existing U.S. wind farms, which include some 20,000 turbines, predominantly in the West and Midwest, produce enough electricity to meet the annual needs of over 1.6 million households. The group also maintains that, based on current rates of growth, the industry could supply 6 percent of the nation's energy within 15 years.

ON THE TOUR in mid-May of the 6-megawatt Searsburg wind farm, opened by the Green Mountain Power Co. of Brattleboro in 1997, Staskus gives a rundown of the facility's details and explains how wind power works. Like them or not, wind turbines are interesting ' the Searsburg site has become a regional tourist attraction over the years and offers regular tours in the summer ' and Staskus takes pains to dispel what she calls the "myths" promoted by wind opponents.

"There's a lot of misinformation out there," says Staskus, a consultant with Vermont Environmental Research

Associates in Waterbury, a firm that has also been working with enXco on the Hoosac Wind Power Project in the Berkshires.

She leads the group inside the base of one of the site's 11 550-kilowatt turbines. Only eight are running today, as two are being repaired and this one has been shut down for visitor safety. Here, a computer receives data from sensors in the turbine's hub that measure the wind's velocity and direction. The computer in turn changes the pitch of the turbine's blades to generate more electricity when wind speed increases, and it instructs the rotor hub to pivot ' a process known as yawing, which produces a loud groaning noise ' to meet a change in wind direction.

The blades begin spinning when wind speed reaches at least 10 mph, and they shut down at 65 mph. A generator located behind the turbine's hub converts the motion to electricity, which is sent via thick cables to the site's substation, about 300 yards from the nearest turbine.

One of the myths about wind power, says Staskus, is that it's unreliable. On the contrary, she says, the turbines at Searsburg are on line over 90 percent of the time and need little maintenance or oversight. "It's a very efficient operation," she says.

In fact, though, the amount of energy wind turbines produce does vary for the simple reason that the wind doesn't blow all the time, or at a constant speed. What's known as the capacity factor measures the difference between how much electricity a turbine produces and what it could generate if it were running at full speed all or most of the time. The Searsburg plant runs at about 25 percent capacity annually, Staskus says. By comparison, fossil-fuel plants, which are shut down perodically for maintenance, average about 70 to 80 percent capacity.

But Staskus cites the most important benefit of wind: clean power. Searsburg produces enough electricity to light 2,000 homes annually, and in doing so displaces about 60 tons of sulfur dioxide and 12,000 tons of carbon dioxide that would otherwise be emitted by fossil-fuel plants, according to statistics provided by enXco.

Staskus also says turbines, which have a service life of about 20 years, can't just be placed anywhere. Much research goes into determining which locations are consistently windy, and such areas must also be close to existing transmission lines and highways for trucking equipment in. "You can't put turbines in a remote wilderness area," she says.

Staskus acknowledges the environmental impact of wind farms but says most of that comes during construction and can be softened, to a degree, with time. Some of the tree cover near the Searsburg site, for example, has begun to grow back in the last eight years. Nor is there evidence the site has led to any substantial bird deaths, she says.

And though she agrees energy conservation is a vital part of any attempt to combat global warming, Staskus says wind power has to be part of the equation as well. "We're watching electricity consumption continue to go up. The reality is we have to find ways to make that electricity in cleaner ways."

PEOPLE LIKE VERA Kelton, though, see little that's clean about wind turbines besides the electricity they produce. Kelton, who lives in Florida near a ridge called Crum Hill, on which nine of the Hoosac Wind Power Project windmills are to be built, says the turbines will leave a big, ugly footprint on pristine land she's hiked for years.

"It will be an incredible wounding of the ridge," says Kelton, a part-time outdoor photographer.

Consider this: To build its 20 turbines in Florida and Monroe, enXco will have to cut about 4" miles of road through forest and wetlands. According to Green Berkshires, the roads may be up to 35 feet wide in places to accommodate specialized trucks weighing nearly 200,000 pounds that are needed to haul in the turbines in sections.

And the 1.5-megawatt turbines themselves are substantially larger than the ones in Searsburg. They'll stand 340 feet tall from the base to the tip of a vertical blade ' about the size of a 34-story building. According to Green Berkshires, seven of the turbines in the project will be among the 10 highest points in the state, visible for miles

around from some directions and affixed with constantly blinking lights required by the Federal Aviation Administration for manmade objects over 200 feet tall.

Kelton is also worried about other problems some associate with wind turbines, like noise or ice throws ' large blocks of ice that can be flung from rotating blades in winter, by some estimates as far as a quarter mile. Wind power advocates insist both of these problems rarely occur.

Kelton said she started out primarily concerned about having to look at the turbines atop Crum Hill. But the more research she's done on wind farms, the more she's come to doubt their value in cleaning the air. She also wonders if spending taxpayer-based subsidies on them makes sense.

"Is this really the best use of our money?" she asks.

Yet in Florida and Monroe, she's in the minority. Both communities approved the Hoosac Wind Power Project by margins of over 70 percent in Town Meetings held in the last two years. Susan Brown, Florida's town administrator, says her town expects to receive between $111,000 and $161,000 annually from leasing municipal land for some of the turbines and collecting property taxes. "It's a significant amount of money for us," says Brown, who notes that Monroe expects to receive a comparable amount of tax revenue.

Stanley Brown, Florida's former town moderator and Susan Brown's father, says critics like Tillinghast and Kelton are missing the larger point. "To me, the most important thing is taking steps to reduce air pollution," he says. "We need to do our part. When you talk about environmental damage, a lot more of it comes from burning coal and oil."

So far, enXco has secured most state permits to begin construction, which was supposed to have started by now. But 10 Florida residents including Kelton, joined by people outside the town like Tillinghast, have appealed a permit granted by the state Department of Environmental Protection, saying Florida's Conservation Commission hasn't addressed potential damage to town wetlands. A hearing on the appeal is scheduled for August.

Alexandra Dawson of Hadley, an environmental lawyer and longtime member of her town's Conservation Commission, is one of the appeal's participants. She says she sees a place for wind power in the country's energy grid, but she's not convinced western Massachusetts is the place for it.

"These things can be so landscape-dominating that we need to proceed very carefully with them," she says, "especially in the Berkshires, where we have a vestige of how God created this green earth." Dawson also wonders whether some power companies are building wind farms merely to avoid cleaning up their polluting fossil-fuel plants elsewhere under federal "cap and trade" laws, which allow companies to offset some pollution by producing renewable energy.

For his part, Stanley Brown has joined with Florida residents and residents of other Berkshire towns to ask the DEP to reject the appeal of the wetlands permit and allow the Hoosac Wind Power Project to go forward. "I think the people who are protesting this just don't want to see [the turbines]," he says.

LOCAL WIND POWER opponents, though, insist this isn't a case of NIMBYism. A more important question, they say, is who's really benefiting from wind power.

Tillinghast, for instance, points to a federal tax credit for production of electricity of 1.8 cents per kilowatt hour; the Hoosac Wind Power Project, which says it will produce 84,000 megawatt hours of electricity a year, would make over $1.5 million annually by that yardstick. Wind farms can also write off capital costs on their federal taxes in six years, less than half the time the government allows for asset depreciation of conventional power plants.

In addition, Massachusetts essentially guarantees that enXco will be able to sell Hoosac's electricity at a profit. Under state law, what's known as Renewable Energy Certificates (RECs) are generated by companies that produce renewable energy and must be purchased by those that don't, the idea being to channel money back to green energy producers to allow them to increase their output. Moreover, the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative

(MTC), the state's development agency for renewable energy, has committed $17 million to the Hoosac Wind Power Project and has also agreed to buy, at a guaranteed price, any RECs enXco is unable to sell from its Berkshire wind project.

Over 15 years, enXco could make as much as $60 million by selling the RECs from the Hoosac Wind Power Project, according to Tillinghast ' all for generating, in one year, the amount of electricity the state consumes in just 12 hours, she claims. "The industry is driven by subsidies," she says. "It can't survive without them."

But all energy sources are subsidized, says Nancy Nylen, associate director of the Center for Ecological Technology, a nonprofit group in Northampton and Pittsfield that promotes a number of environmental issues, including renewable energy. Nylen, who has led information sessions in Berkshire towns on wind energy, says the conventional power industries have been heavily subsidized for years and have far more political clout than does the wind power industry.

The incentives for wind energy, Nylen says, are needed "just to level the playing field." And, she says, fossil-fuel plants bring additional public costs, such as the environmental damage caused by acid rain, or the expense of treating people sickened by air pollution.

According to a 1999 DOE report, fossil fuels received about half of the $6.2 billion in federal energy subsidies that year, compared to $1.1 billion for all renewable resources, including wind, solar and hydro power, ethanol, and biomass.

But in a case of strange bedfellows, environmentalists like Tillinghast now find themselves aligned with conservative critics of wind power who have long claimed that on a per-kilowatt basis, renewable energy is much more heavily subsidized than conventional sources ' and as such is an ineffective part of a free energy market. Extended commentary from one such critic, Glenn Schleede, a former vice president of the American Coal Association, appears on the Green Berkshires Web site and the Web pages of several other anti-wind power groups around the country.

THE LARGER ISSUE for wind opponents is their suspicion that many developers, lured by incentives, are getting into the field for the money, rather than out of concern for the environment. "These are not mom and pop businesses," says Tillinghast, noting that General Electric is the biggest manufacturer of turbines in the country.

According to U.S. Sen. Lamar Alexander of Tennessee, GE's wind division saw 500 percent growth in the past year. Alexander, a wind power critic, recently introduced legislation in the Senate to tighten permitting of wind farms and said, "The windmills we are talking about today are not your grandmother's windmills."

enXco is affiliated with the EDF Group (Electricit, de France), a company largely owned by the French government and operated as a monopoly in France, which gets nearly 80 percent of its power from nuclear energy. And two years ago, John Zimmerman, the president of Vermont Environmental Research Associates in Vermont, told the Boston Globe that "Wind has become a serious way to make money."

But in an email message, Zimmerman says that quote was taken out of context. He says he'd only been trying to point out that wind has become an "economically viable" way to make electricity and as such can be a source of income for anyone investing in it. The more important goal of wind power, he adds, is that of "improved air quality and more reliable sources of regionally produced electricity."

The AWEA contends that many small- and medium-sized wind-power companies are attracted to the appeal of clean energy and can now compete with bigger firms in the deregulated energy market. More to the point, says one observer, is it unreasonable to expect a company to want to profit from an energy project?

"I don't think anyone's going to get into this business if they think they're going to lose their shirt," says Warren Leon, deputy director of the Renewable Energy Trust for the MTC. "There's no denying there are some generous tax incentives for the wind industry. But if your only goal is to make money, there are certainly much easier ways to go

about it."

Leon, whose agency is also working with developers of wind projects in Hancock and Lenox, disputes the idea that the Berkshires will be inundated with turbines; he says New England's hilly, wooded terrain makes wind power a more expensive proposition for developers here than in, say, the Midwest. "The appropriate sites are limited, and everyone acknowledges that each individual project has to be looked at very carefully. We'll be able to see if the first ones that go up work."

Opponents maintain that the 130-turbine Cape Wind Project proposed off Nantucket, which is projected to produce 420 megawatts of power, will probably not gain approval because it faces too much opposition from powerful players like Sen. Edward Kennedy and Gov. Mitt Romney. Romney, by contrast, supports wind farms in the Berkshires, and a number of state representatives from the region have also lobbied for wind power there.

If Massachusetts is to meet its future goals for renewable energy, then, wind farms could come in a big way to the Berkshires, say critics ' perhaps in the form of 400-plus turbines.

David Cash, the director of air for the state's Executive Office of Environmental Affairs, says he's been overseeing creation of a plan for siting wind farms on state land. "We're trying to find a balance," he says. "The [Romney] administration is very pro-renewable, so there will probably be some tradeoffs, but there's also a very high hurdle [in overcoming laws for building on state land]. We'll be proceeding carefully."

IN THE END, SOME PEOPLE just don't know what to think of wind power ' whether turbines in scenic places are a worthwhile tradeoff for cleaner air, and at what point their numbers could reach an unacceptable tipping point.

Jim Daigle lives about half a mile down the road from the Searsburg wind farm. From his front yard he can see the turbines, but he can rarely hear them and they don't bother him. He says he knows few neighbors put out by them, either.

But Daigle is concerned by a proposed expansion of the site that enXco is developing, one that could add 25 to 30 of the newer, taller turbines to the ridge and adjoining areas. "Everyone wants to support renewable energy, but I don't know," he says, his voice trailing off. "If you put up enough of these turbines, you may destroy the aesthetics of the Green Mountains."

Yet how important are aesthetics in a world where, in theory, New England landscapes could be radically reshaped by global warming? And what about the risks from other forms of energy production? Florida and Monroe are within shouting distance of the now-closed Rowe nuclear plant, where spent fuel rods are still stored, and perhaps 35 miles from the Vermont Yankee nuclear plant north of Brattleboro. Are the environmental impacts and aesthetics of wind power worse than the dangers posed by radioactive fuel?

One answer could be building more wind farms offshore, where winds tend to be highest. Jon McGowan, a University of Massachusetts professor of mechanical and industrial engineering, is doing research on deep-water wind farms ' large turbines that would be placed on floating platforms away from coastlines and out of sight.

UMass has a long history with wind power, where research efforts led by the late professor William Heronemus included a wind turbine on campus in the 1970s, designed to generate heat, that at the time was the largest turbine in the United States. That experiment, however, didn't prove effective, so the turbine eventually was taken down. The university also has operated a turbine on Mount Tom in Easthampton for about 10 years, mainly for research. Today, many of the professors such as McGowan orginally doing wind power research are still involved in the field both on and off campus, like developing improved turbine blades.

In that sense, McGowan understands that the aesthetics of wind farms may well be an unresolvable issue. "I like the looks of [turbines]," he says. "I know a lot of people don't, but then I don't like the looks of a Pennsylvania coal mine, either."

But Charles Cutler, a semi-retired Smith College professor who lives in West Hawley, says determined energy conservation will more than cover the minor increase in electricity production that would be gained by building hundreds or even thousands of windmills in New England.

"The answer is not making more energy but using what we do make more wisely," says Cutler, a Hoosac Wind Power Project critic who joined Tillinghast and some 50 other people at a meeting in West Hawley in April to discuss forming a national group opposed to what he calls "industrial wind power."

If people in western Massachusetts don't take a hard look beyond the industry's mantra of "clean energy," Cutler warns, they may wake up one day to find the region's "modest ridgelines and small-scale appeal," as he puts it, transformed into a science-fiction landscape of giant, whirling turbines, the area's quality of life and tourism-dependent economy badly eroded.

"There is a value to the land by itself," he says simply. "You can't put a price tag on it."q

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Which way if the wind blowing?

To get two diametrically opposed views of wind power, you can visit www.greenberkshires.org and www.hoosacwind.com

WINDS OF CHANGE SWEE PING BERKSHIRES - CONNECTICUT'S RENEWABLE ENERGY NEEDS CAUGHT UP IN BATTLE OVER PROPOSALS FOR FIVE WIND FARMS ON WESTERN MASSACHUSETTS RIDGELINES

May 31, 2005 | Hartford Courant, The (CT)
Author: RINKER BUCK; COURANT STAFF WRITER | Section: MAIN | 2242 Words
Page: A1
OpenURL Link

When she was growing up on her family's small subsistence farm in this remote mountain hamlet near the Vermont line, Vera Kelton always looked forward to waking in the morning to the welcome lowing of her father's cows.

But Kelton, who now lives in the converted barn of the old family homestead, could spend the next 20 years or more waking to very different sights and sounds.

Sometime next year, if the project clears its final permitting obstacles, a California company called enXco Inc. will begin erecting 20 General Electric wind turbines, each more than 30 stories tall, along Crum Hill and Bakke Mountain, surrounding the old Kelton farm and the neighboring properties along Tilda Hill Road.

The Hoosac Wind Power Project -- partially funded by the Clean Energy Fund of Connecticut -- is one of five wind projects proposed for the Berkshires. It will require more than 4 miles of access roads along the ridges, forest cuts for transmission lines, 24-hour navigation lights, and what Kelton and her neighbors fear will be the constant noise of turbine generators grinding and propellers whooshing through the air.

``We grew up in the shadow of Crum Hill, climbing it as kids after school to find my father's cows -- that was our world,'' Kelton says. ``Now we're going to have to live with the sound of these turbines 24 hours a day, a complete change from what we have known.''

In the past year, the historic and relatively untouched ridgelines of the Berkshires -- among the most protected in the country -- have become a battleground for neighbors opposed to the plans of well-financed energy companies from out of state intent on exploiting the best windswept terrain for renewable energy generation.

Besides the Hoosac project, these proposals also are being considered for western Massachusetts:

Disgen, a Colorado renewable power company, in conjunction with Massachusetts' development agency for renewable energy, the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative, have received all their permits for a 10-turbine site on Brodie Mountain in the Berkshire town of Hancock. They plan to begin laying their turbine foundations this fall.

The town of Lenox is considering developing a one-turbine facility on Lenox Mountain to power its water treatment plant and about 200 homes.

Williams College in Williamstown is exploring a wind farm, with perhaps as many as seven turbines, on land it owns on the Berlin Pass along the New York state line.

A Waltham, Mass., company, Minuteman Wind LLC, is proposing a seven-turbine facility on a 300-acre site in the town of Savoy, population 700.

The arrival of ``wind farms'' in the Berkshires has accentuated divisions within the environmental community, between those who embrace clean energy alternatives as a way to combat global warming and those who place a higher value on uninterrupted scenic landscapes.

Wind-generation provides less than 2 percent of America's electrical needs, but by 2020 it is expected to grow to

almost 6 percent of U.S. output. This growth has made wind power one of the fastest-growing energy sources, with the bulk of capacity installed in massive clusters of 100 or more turbines in California and Texas.

With most Northeastern states establishing ambitious goals of eventually receiving 5 percent or more of their power from renewable sources, the race is on to lock up favorable wind sites. Most are located in areas where conflicts with scenic values and tourist economies are the highest: in the mountains and off the coastline.

One recent study by the Appalachian Mountain Club identified 93 miles of Berkshire ridgelines that could be developed for wind power. The Appalachian Club is one of many environmental groups that supports renewable energy in theory, while saying that siting decisions must be made carefully to avoid other environmental conflicts.

``The Berkshires are full of people who recognize the threat of global warming and want to do something about it,'' says Tad Ames, president of the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, which has conserved thousands of acres in the region. ``But there's a rush to build wind-generating plants on the basis that they have a low impact and are a solution to all of our problems. But any wind energy produced by the Berkshires will be just a teaspoon's worth of effort toward combating global warming, so why not take the time to study it properly?''

The pressures on western Massachusetts' high, wind-rich terrain are compounded by several factors. At the other end of the state, a controversial, high-profile wind project -- the 130-turbine Cape Wind proposal, which would be located 6 miles off-shore in Nantucket Sound -- is opposed by Massachusetts Gov. Mitt Romney, though some state energy officials remain confident that the project will eventually be built. But Massachusetts badly needs the projected Cape Wind output to meet its declared ``renewable portfolio standards'' of producing 4 percent of its electrical power through alternative means by 2009. Most Eastern states have adopted renewable goals that require utilities and electrical suppliers to gradually increase their output of renewable energy from sources such as wind and solar power. The companies face stiff financial penalties if they don't meet the goals.

Failure to build Cape Wind, some Berkshire environmentalists fear, will only increase interest in sites in their area, threatening the views and unspoiled landscapes that have traditionally drawn visitors to cultural attractions like Tanglewood and the region's ski areas.

``Massachusetts' renewable portfolio standards indicate that we'll need 480 of these onshore turbines by the end of 2009, if Cape Wind is not built,'' says Eleanor Tillinghast, president of the conservation group Green Berkshires, which has campaigned against the wind power projects. ``Without the off-shore turbines, the state will have only one other place to turn, western Massachusetts, and we could end up with all of them. Why ruin the mountains for something that's going to produce such negligible returns? The landscape is not a renewable resource.''

But the intrusion on the environment there will be nothing like the mammoth wind projects that have been built in the West and Midwest, say government officials responsible for shepherding renewable-energy projects through their planning and investment phase.

``If Cape Wind happens, we will more than meet the renewable portfolio standards,'' says Robert L. Pratt, director of the Massachusetts Renewable Energy Trust, a division of the Massachusetts Technology Collaborative that manages and promotes the state's clean-energy initiatives. ``But even without Cape Wind, I can't see more than four or five major projects down the road in the Berkshires. That's a long way away from the turbine on every ridge that some of these opponents talk about.''

Additional pressure has been placed on the Berkshires by Connecticut, which has few realistic sites for developing wind projects but is satisfying its renewable standards by investing in nearby projects. According to Charles Moret, managing director for marketing for the Connecticut Clean Energy Fund, the state's only likely sites for wind power are either in mountainous regions in the Northwest Corner or along coastal southeastern Connecticut. But stringing together enough private parcels to build an efficient wind farm would probably be financially prohibitive in the northwest hills. Because of Cape Wind's protracted permitting efforts, other wind-power companies are reluctant to take on the expensive, several-year effort required for permitting a wind farm along the heavily populated Connecticut coast.

Connecticut's Clean Energy Fund made a ``startup investment'' of $550,000 in 2001 to help in land acquisition and permitting for Hoosac Wind, funds that have since been repaid at a profit. Connecticut electrical suppliers also will benefit by being able to buy ``renewable energy certificates'' from projects such as Hoosac as a substitute for building their own clean-energy facilities.

Critics such as Tillinghast criticize the considerable array of tax breaks and direct government support received by wind energy projects. The federal energy production tax credit extends a 1.9-cent benefit for every kilowatt-hour of electricity produced during the first 10 years of a wind farm's life. Wind-energy companies also benefit from generous accelerated depreciation write-offs, and the purchase of their renewable certificates by state agencies interested in supporting the industry. The Massachusetts Technology Collaborative has pledged $25.8 million in either outright purchases or options to support the Hoosac and Berkshire projects.

``I call these wind-energy entities `green cover' companies because a lot of people, even environmentalists, feel comfortable about them because it looks like they're good guys doing something attractive about global warming,'' says Tillinghast. ``But they're not really investing for the energy they'll produce, which is negligible. They're investing for the tax breaks and subsidies.''

But Pratt and other renewable energy advocates argue that the same generous tax and subsidy benefits are available to traditional energy suppliers such as gas and oil companies, and that kick-starting a new industry is impossible without them.

``In most cases, the tax aspects and the accelerated depreciation represent approximately 30 percent of the financing for wind projects,'' Pratt says. ``And the industry comes to a halt without them.''

But arcane arguments about tax breaks for the wind industry seemed to have made little impression on the citizens of the town of Florida, who have been promised an estimated $100,000 to $150,000 in annual property taxes paid by Hoosac Wind. In 2003, the town voted twice in support of the project, ignoring the complaints of the immediate neighbors along Tilda Hill Road.

Because Hoosac Wind provided figures that showed it would disturb no more than 50 acres to build its access road and tower supports, the project did not require a full state Environmental Impact Report. (The project, however, did receive approval from local land use boards.) Kelton's citizen group, with the support of Green Berkshires, has won the right to argue wetlands and wildlife issues before an appeals magistrate in Boston this August.

``We're an abutting landowner to the project, and it just felt like it was all decided before we learned about it,'' says Monica Wissman, a substitute teacher and neighbor of Kelton's who moved to Florida in 1999 with her husband and four children to pursue a life of snowshoeing, gardening, and hiking on the Berkshire peaks. ``Nobody really knew what was happening and the whole project was already underway without so much as a full environmental review.''

``We complied with every requirement that the state of Massachusetts and the town required,'' says John Zimmerman of Waterbury, Vt., who manages development for enXco's Northeast projects. ``Once that is established after the administrative appeal, we hope to get started, maybe even as early as this year.''

Meanwhile, another enXco facility, the 11-turbine Searsburg Wind project in southern Vermont, has become a magnet for Berkshire County residents concerned about the impact of wind turbines being discussed for their ridgelines. When it was commissioned in 1997, Searsburg became the largest wind-generating facility in the Northeast, and EnXco is now considering expanding the project by as many as 30 turbines on neighboring ridges.

Tom Gardner, a vice president of the Richmond, Mass., Land Trust, who is concerned about a proposal to locate a wind turbine nearby on Lenox Mountain, went along on a company-sponsored tour of the Searsburg Wind plant in mid-May.

``These things are very impactful for anyone close by -- there's a constant whooshing sound and a general grinding

noise that you can hear,'' Gardner said. ``Where they are in Searsburg may be ideal because they are far away from any home sites, but located in an area like Lenox Mountain, where there are many more houses, they are going to severely impact the quality of life.''

But retired teacher Jim Daigle, who lives about 1 1/2 miles away from the turbines along sparsely populated Route 8 in Searsburg, seems unfazed by the company's plans to expand by erecting new towers that will be 100 feet taller than the present ones.

``Except for the destruction of the Green Mountain landscape right here, they've really been no problem and make no sound at all,'' Daigle says. ``The only thing I worry about are car crashes. People from out of town come over the rise here and see those windmills, stand on their brakes, and back up all of the traffic behind them. That's the only risk I see.''

While she awaits the environmental appeal in August, Vera Kelton is busy in her converted barn, reading up on subjects such as ice throw in winter and the bird kill statistics of wind projects in California. Her thinking about wind energy has evolved, she says, and is no longer dominated by ``not-in-my-backyard'' concerns about noise and aesthetics.

``The problem I have with wind power right now is that what it gives me in return is so minimal,'' Kelton says. ``If we were really producing that much with a wind energy plant and contributing to reducing global warming, fine. But we're not gaining that much in return for our local sacrifice.''

A discussion of this story with Courant Staff Writer Rinker Buck is scheduled to be shown on New England Cable News each hour today between 9 a.m. and noon

Recorder Staff A group supporting the proposed Hoosac Wind energy project in Monroe and Florida is seeking to intervene to balance out opponents who have stalled wetlands permitting for the 20-turbine project.

May 12, 2005 | Recorder, The [30 Day Embargo] (Greenfield, MA)
201 Words
OpenURL Link

Berkshire Citizens for Clean Energy and the Environment, composed of residents of Florida and six other Berkshire County communities, argue the project "will provide sustainable, clean energy while meeting the exacting requirements for any other project requiring work in or near wetland resource areas."

Earlier this spring, project opponents appealed conditions imposed by the Florida Conservation Commission and the state Department of Environmental Protection in permitting the project. The state has established an expedited schedule for administrative review, with three days of scheduled hearings to begin Aug. 16.

Member Stanley Brown, a 71-year Florida resident, said, "Florida residents have overwhelmingly supported the project in two votes. This project will have long-term environmental, public health and economic benefits for the towns of Florida and Monroe, the Berkshires and the overall environment in the Northeast."

Member Steve Cowell of Tyringham added, "We absolutely want this project held to the same standards that apply to any other project potentially affecting our important wetlands. However, when this process is used as a delaying tactic, especially when there is an absence of new substantive information, it weakens the legitimate use of those environmental reviews."

The group expects a ruling on its motion to intervene by May 15.

Rules needed in wind-power game

May 5, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Section: Editorials | 417 Words
OpenURL Link

Out on Cape Cod, Massachusetts officials are making wind power developers run a brutal gauntlet of environmental regulation. In the Berkshires, by contrast, they've been relatively hands-off. The meeting between state environmental officials, developers and environmentalists at City Hall this week was a tacit admission that Massachusetts has no real policy on the siting of wind power farms, and that it needs one. Now.

Everybody agreed that the state needs a consistent set of regulations that apply at all times and places, a clear set of rules that define a closed-ended process. The developers were hoping for the fast track, while the environmentalists were saying "not so fast!"

The Eagle supports wind power, seeing it as a renewable, environmentally sound alternative to oil, coal or nuclear power-generated electricity. Our support of the Hoosac Wind Project on Florida Mountain is predicated on its distance from Berkshire population centers and on its sensitivity to its mountain location. But The Eagle doesn't make the rules, and the dearth of state oversight and lack of a consistent policy are troubling.

The Berkshire Natural Resources Council has raised a number of important points which the authorities have, so far, neglected to consider. Most important is the lack of a decommissioning plan for the windmills should they become technologically or economically obsolete. Such a plan, and provision for money to carry it out, should accompany any license, so host towns will not be stuck with the bill. The Resources Council believes that land held for conservation purposes, whether public or private, should not be used for wind power development. That land should be held to the highest standard for any proposed project, including windmills.

The biggest environmental impact of any wind farm will be the road to the top of the mountain, followed closely by the effect on flying wildlife. The state already has an environmental review process in place for big projects like this, which the wind farms have avoided by keeping their footprint under the 50-acre minimum that triggers a review under the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act. No project this significant should be exempt from MEPA.

Wind power technology holds great promise to help free our state and country from its economically and ecologically unsound dependence on energy from fossil fuels. The development of a wind power policy should not be exploited by wind power opponents as a delaying tactic to frustrate wind farm developers. Instead, this process should produce an intelligent, coherent process that enables the state to exploit a clean source of energy with the least possible impact upon the environment.

State brings wind-power sides to table

May 4, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: Headlines | 632 Words
OpenURL Link

PITTSFIELD -- There's one thing that apparently everyone with an opinion on wind power in Berkshire County can agree on: The state needs to do more in terms of guidance and regulation.

But the motivations for more state involvement vary, between whether the state should create a clear path for potential projects, or subject them to a more comprehensive and rigorous review.

That much was clear yesterday morning as officials from the state Executive Office of Environmental Affairs held an informal discussion with about 25 environmentalists and developers at City Hall.

David Cash, EOEA's director of air policy, explained that the meeting was called to work out guidance for towns, developers and agencies and to find a way to balance the state's efforts to encourage renewable energy and minimize environmental, aesthetic and other impacts.

He said the state hopes to have some draft guidelines for discussion ready by early summer. "We're very open to what this guidance might look like," he said.

The discussion comes as at least two significant wind power projects work their way toward coming online. The 10-turbine Berkshire Wind Power LLC project on Brodie Mountain in Hancock may begin construction this year. The 20-turbine Hoosac Wind project proposed for Florida and Monroe will go before an appeals magistrate in Boston this August, and may proceed with construction next year.

Narain Schroeder, of the Berkshire Natural Resources Council, urged some sort of state guidance on approving wind power projects.

"There must be state regulation or there won't be any consistency," he said.

He said that there was already a great difference between the amount of study that has gone into the Cape Wind project on Cape Cod and into the projects in Berkshire County.

"From our perspective, we're getting shortchanged," he said.

Other environmentalists noted that broader studies of the consequences of turbines are often essential. For example, the impact on migratory birds would require more than the site-by-site studies conducted now.

State Rep. Denis Guyer, D-Dalton, attended the meeting and agreed that some state guidance was necessary. He noted the precedent set by cell phone towers, which in some cases were put up and abandoned once they became unprofitable.

He said that could have an impact on the region's tourism economy. "We do not want to pay economically for wind towers that might not be used in 10 or 20 years," he said.

Matt Kearns, who works for consulting firm Tetra Tech Inc., said the state's regulations should reflect more than just what developers cannot do.

"It's great when you come to a state that says, 'This is what you do,' not just 'This what you can't do,' " he said.

Eleanor Tillinghast of the environmental group Green Berkshires said more public participation is needed.

"There needs to be a clear, well-laid process of public participation that gives everyone a chance to be involved," she said.

But Nicholas Hiza of the wind development company Greenlight Energy noted that developers need to have some sort of certainty that the process won't continue on indefinitely. He recommended a set of "clear, attainable goals."

"It has to have an end," he said.

Among the ideas discussed were finding a way to peg state support for projects -- through the Massachustts Technology Collaborative -- to meeting certain requirements, and possibly finding a role for the state's Energy Facilities Siting Board. The board is a part of the state Department of Telecommunications and Energy, and currently only reviews projects of larger than 100 megawatts.

The meeting ran just slightly more than two hours. Meetings in Cash's "wind tour" have been held on Cape Cod and the North and South Shore areas. Another meeting was scheduled for yesterday afternoon in Amherst, and another will be held in Boston later this month.

Christopher Marcisz can be reached at cmarcisz@berkshireeagle.com or at (413) 664-4995.

RICHIE DAVIS Recorder Staff CHARLEMONT -- A group of 25 business people along the Mohawk Trail is calling for a meeting with state Highway Department officials to discuss proposed transportation of massive wind turbines from Charlemont to Monroe and Florida -- even though Hoosac Wind Project representatives could be months away from seeking permission to ship the equipment.

April 25, 2005 | Recorder, The [30 Day Embargo] (Greenfield, MA)
579 Words
OpenURL Link

According to information provided to the Charlemont Planning Board, the trucks making the 7-mile trek westward up the extremely curvy highway would be a maximum of 195,000 pounds and up to 135 feet long. An estimated 140 trips would be needed, each taking about two hours of traveling at estimated 5 miles per hour.

The petition, sent to state District Highway Director Ross Dindio last week, calls for a meeting "as soon as possible" to allow members of the business community, public safety officials and other citizens to learn more about "the impacts of potential road closures, detours and delays resulting from the project."

The 20-turbine wind project, which would generate 30 megawatts, has been stalled by an appeal to the Division of Administrative Law Appeals challenging environmental review of access roads, and Hoosac Wind spokesman Sam Bittman said a decision is not expected until this fall.

The petition is an outgrowth of a special permit granted by the Charlemont Planning Board in February allowing a parcel adjacent to a rail siding in west Charlemont to be used for unloading and temporarily storing the turbines before transporting them by truck to Crum Hill in Monroe and Bakke Mountain in Florida. Bittman said the turbines have not yet been ordered, with up to a six-month backlog before they could even be delivered.

The special permit, granted by the town in February for a set of parcels about 1,000 feet west of the Hail to the Sunrise monument and Mohawk Park Campground, is under appeal by an abutter.

"We're a year away from transport season," said Bittman, pointing out that the shipments wouldn't take place during winter months, and that there is no schedule at this point for filing for a permit from the state Highway Department.

Lloyd Crawford of Hawley, a spokesman for the petition group, said, "If the information can come out the sooner, the better," and that his concern is simply that there is a public process involved in deciding on the turbine transportation.

Crawford, who has been working on developing draft bylaws on wind-power developments in Hawley, said the petition is not calling for a general forum on wind power itself. In a written statement, Crawford said he has spoken to both proponents and opponents of wind power, and is struck by "how little opportunity there has been for public discussion about the various aspects of this project. This has led to a great deal of misinformation largely due to the fact that most people have obtained information second hand. To date, the only public meetings on wind power have been at the local level dealing specifically with local issues Transportation of wind turbine parts and construction materials is a key issue that more information is needed on so that planners, such as myself, can reasonably address the associated impacts."

Bittman said engineers estimate there will be about eight trucks a day, possibly in convoys, not on holidays or weekends, and that only westbound traffic would be affected. Protocol would allow for the trucks to pull over to allow other westbound traffic to pass on straight-away sections.

"If folks need an open session, there will be a forum for it," said Bittman. "We'd be happy to be available to provide

all of the information we could."

Highway Department spokesman John Carlisle, however, said the department's standard review process, generally takes "a matter of weeks," and rarely, if ever, involves a public hearing.

"I don't believe a hearing is necessary," he said. "That would be unprecedented."You can reach Richie Davis at rdavis@recorder.com

or (413) 772-0261 Ext. 269

Trail businesses seek meeting on turbine transports

April 15, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript | Section: Today's Headlines | 427 Words
OpenURL Link

NORTH ADAMS -- Twenty-five Mohawk Trail business owners petitioned the Massachusetts Highway Department for an informational public meeting about the shipping of wind turbine parts along the route. MassHighway, though, has declined to schedule the session.

Hoosac Wind project

The Hoosac Wind project, a 20-turbine wind farm proposed for Florida and Monroe, would, if approved, require the transport of large turbine parts along Route 2. The project is still undergoing legal appeals, and construction could begin at the soonest in October.

Lloyd Crawford, owner of Stump Sprouts lodge in Charlemont, said he had received no word from the state highway office in Lenox a week after sending the petition. The business owners are located from North Adams to Shelburne Falls.

"I cannot see a reason why anyone would oppose this initiative. I should think that MassHighway and proponents of the project would welcome the opportunity to assure the public that access to Route 2 will not be compromised," Crawford stated in a written statement.

But Jon Carlisle, press secretary for MassHighway, said a hearing on the subject would be "unprecedented."

"We just don't have public meeting for permits on oversized load," said Carlisle. "We take the convenience of motorists into consideration, and we do not let something significantly disrupt that convenience."

Crawford said the public has received a lot of second-hand information on the turbine project, and wanted to cut through the rumors to find the real facts.

"To date, the only public meetings on wind power have been at the local level dealing specifically with local issues," wrote Crawford. "As this issue points out, construction impacts will have regional implications."

Regional impact requires a regional meeting, he suggested.

Process in place

Carlisle said there is a standard review process in place, which inspects truck loads' weight, size and content before authorizing state road use.

"That review process will be applied in this case, but we don't believe that a hearing is necessary," said Carlisle.

Carlisle said he has not seen the specifics of the Hoosac Wind plan, but said the department already dealt with and approved some "very large loads." Instead of a public hearing to get the facts about the turbine project, Carlisle suggested calling the Lenox department office with queries, at 413-637-1750.

According to information Crawford received from a Charlemont Planning Board meeting, moving of the turbine parts will require up to 135-foot trucks. Also, project developers expect up to eight trucks traveling over Route 2 every other day during the six-month transportation phase.

The truck would move at 5 miles per hour and take about two hours to go from loading to installation sites, he said.

Turbine permits obtained

April 14, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: Headlines | 443 Words
OpenURL Link

HANCOCK -- After almost 10 years of planning and delay, officials for Berkshire Wind Power LLC say they are ready to begin construction on a 10-turbine wind power farm on Brodie Mountain.

The sole obstacle remaining is the availability of the actual wind turbines from manufacturers, because of a backlog of orders for other projects.

This comes as the 20-turbine Hoosac Wind project proposed for Florida and Monroe hit a snag last month that will prevent construction from beginning until next year at the earliest.

An administrative magistrate in Boston will hear an appeal on wetland issues in mid-August, meaning Hoosac Wind will probably lose the 2005 building season.

Wetlands approval

William Sheperdson, a spokesman for Berkshire Wind, said it has received its final permit -- a superseding order of conditions for wetland issues -- from the state Department of Environment Protection.

He said the permit for the roughly $25 million project came early last month, and the window for appeals has expired.

Berkshire Wind's owners, Distributed Generation Systems Inc. of Colorado, hope to have the Hancock project up and running by the end of the year.

"If we can get going before the end of May, we'll probably be OK," Sheperdson said. "It'll be a tight schedule, but the main construction project is just getting the road up Brodie."

But he said it is unclear whether the company will be able to get the actual turbines in time and that it is in discussions with its supplier, General Electric, as well as others. Berkshire Wind expects to know more within a few weeks.

Wind power projects across the nation were put on hold last year because the federal production tax credit -- a critical piece of incentive financing for wind projects -- had expired and not been renewed.

When the credit was renewed last fall, a backlog of projects were moved into production, creating a backlog of turbine orders.

But because the renewal was only for 2005, developers like Berkshire Wind are eager to get their projects up and running before the end of the year.

"We're not saying we absolutely can do it, but that's what we're shooting for," Sheperdson said.

When completed, the Berkshire Wind project could generate up to 15 megawatts of electricity.

Last December, the developer signed a 22-year contract to sell power to Massachusetts Municipal Wholesale Electric Co., a Ludlow-based nonprofit power buyer that represents 14 public-owned electric utilities, mostly in the eastern part of the state.

The long-delayed project was first proposed in 1996, and was entangled in a series of disputes between town officials and the developers, which were finally resolved in October 2002.

Christopher Marcisz can be reached at cmarcisz@berkshireeagle.com or at (413) 664-4995.

Berkshire Wind lands Hancock permits

April 14, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle | Section: Local Headlines | 429 Words
OpenURL Link

HANCOCK -- After almost 10 years of planning and delay, officials for Berkshire Wind Power LLC say they are ready to begin construction on a 10-turbine wind power farm on Brodie Mountain.

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- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle, 'Berkshire Wind lands Hancock permits', *North Adams Transcript* (online), 14 Apr 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/1097B33A3A23E5E9›

Savoy mulls wind farm guidelines

April 7, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript | Section: Local Headlines | 473 Words
OpenURL Link

SAVOY -- The town planning board expects to complete new wind turbine bylaws in the upcoming months, establishing guidelines over the controversial energy source.

A seven-turbine wind farm has been proposed for 300 acres of undeveloped land by Harwood and Barnard roads, owned by resident Harold Malloy. The expected project developer is Waltham-based Minuteman Wind LLC. Malloy said the project will not be ready for construction, if it is approved, for at least another year.

A 20-turbine wind farm -- Hoosac Wind -- is proposed for Florida and Monroe, and there is another wind project on hold for Readsboro, Vt., an extension of the Searsburg Wind Facility.

A 10-turbine project is slated for Hancock and a possible wind farm is under consideration in Lenox. Both Williamstown and North Adams were eyed for wind projects in previous years. None of these communities have wind turbine bylaws.

Planning board Chairman Jamie Reinhardt said the board -- which met Wednesday night -- is still in the preliminary stages of creating the bylaws, and should be finished in about two months. The bylaws will then have to be voted on at a special town meeting, he said.

Reinhardt said there will be no zoning changes or restrictions in the bylaws, keeping Savoy with just a single zoning category. He said the bylaws would not have simply one or two specific priorities, but would address a large mix of related topics, such as residential safety, emergency protocol, visibility, noise, tower signage, road access and wildlife.

A stipulation could also be included to define a maximum height for the turbines.

"We do have an obligation to set a reasonable height," said Reinhardt. "We don't want [turbines] to get higher and higher and higher."

The Savoy project would use 1.5 megawatt General Electric turbines, which are about 340 feet high from base to turbine blade tip. As wind energy technology continues to improve, turbines have grown in height significantly. The turbines in Searsburg, Vt., were built in 1997 and are half the height of the proposed turbines in Savoy.

Anthony Ellis, a research assistant for the Renewable Energy Research Laboratory in University of Massachusetts at Amherst, came to the meeting to help answer the board members' questions about wind energy and advise on different bylaw provisions. Ellis, who has been assisting Malloy for several years with his project, said he will continue to guide the board through the bylaw process.

The planning board is using the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission's initial draft of its wind turbine bylaws. Reinhardt said the board decided to create the bylaws after some local interest.

Malloy, who was at the planning board meeting, said he supported creating the bylaws.

"I kind of look at [the wind farm] as the town's project. The people in Savoy will make the call, I just wanted to pursue the idea," Malloy said. "I hope it'll work out for everybody."

- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript, 'Savoy mulls wind farm guidelines', *North Adams Transcript* (online), 7 Apr 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/109564AFDEEA8B6E›

Wind project developers still hopeful

April 6, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: City & Town | 411 Words
OpenURL Link

FLORIDA -- The proposed developers of the Hoosac Wind power project in Florida and Monroe remain optimistic about the project's prospects, despite a recent decision that will push back the project at least a year.

"We're still very optimistic," Hoosac Wind spokesman Sam Bittman said. "It's a good project. The permitting is strong, the public support is strong, it's just going to take a little longer to get to the point where we get that [state] permit."

An administrative magistrate for the state's Division of Administrative Law Appeals ruled March 28 that a hearing on an appeal against the project would be held Aug.16.

The developers -- California-based enXco -- had hoped to have a ruling on the project by April so construction could begin this spring.

The project would place 11 wind turbines on Bakke Mountain in Florida, and another nine on Crum Hill in Monroe. The roughly $40 million project could generate up to 30 megawatts of electricity.

Bittman said the developers will be unable to do any work at the site because the nature of the appeal centers around concerns about wetlands, which would be affected by access roads that would be the first step in the construction process.

He also said the wind power industry is facing a shortage of actual turbines. Last year, with the lapse in a key federal production tax credit to encourage the creation of wind projects, many projects on the drawing board were delayed.

Industry bottleneck

"It's created a considerable bottleneck for the industry," Bittman said.

He added that the tax credit is scheduled to expire this year, and that was part of the reason his group wanted to get the project up and running before the end of the year.

The federal credit was renewed for one year last fall, and it is not certain it will be renewed again.

The litigation schedule for the appeals against the project was set by Administrative Magistrate Natalie Monroe. 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 to begin on Aug. 16, and it is unclear when a ruling will be reached.

The appeals against the environmental impacts of the project were filed last fall by a group of Florida residents and another group of county residents.

The developers hoped to have the matter resolved in an expedited fashion, and the state Department of Environmental Protection agreed.

Christopher Marcisz can be reached at cmarcisz@berkshireeagle.com or at (413) 664-4995.

- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle Staff, 'Wind project developers still hopeful', *Berkshire Eagle, The* (online), 6 Apr 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/109510DC32028FCB›

Wind power should be promoted

April 5, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Section: Letters | 431 Words
OpenURL Link

To the Editor of THE EAGLE:

Currently there has been much debate over the issue of installing wind power in suitable areas in the Berkshires as well as regionally. I would like to weigh in on this by advocating for the positive results that renewable energy sources can bring.

As a 15-year-old student I am concerned about the future of our environment and its current deteriorating status. Global warming is gradually becoming more apparent and more dangerous. Gas prices are at an all time high. Lives are being taken away in attempting to gain access to Middle East oil reserves. I am one to believe that our energy plan needs serious consideration and revision.

The first step in doing this is to explore the options that alternative energy sources, like wind, solar, and hydro power have to offer. These resources are unlimited and much cleaner. Wind power is currently the fastest growing energy source. In fact, if we only used .05 percent of the wind energy flowing around the planet, we'd have more energy than the human race currently uses.

A few weeks ago I saw wind turbines in Searsburg, Vt. These majestic wind machines amazed me, standing there so peacefully producing power. Critics charge that wind turbines disturb natural scenic beauty, but I'd rather look at a turbine than a smokestack. Opposition also claims that wind turbines will be responsible for the death of thousands of bats, but what about the fossil fuel pollutants that are responsible for the death of millions of humans, animals, and fish?

Our best option may be to combine wind and solar power. Through a science fair experiment I learned about wind and solar hybrid systems, and found that a combination of two energy sources is more effective than each one on its own. I propose that we use solar power in ultimately sunny places, like Arizona or Florida, wind power in predominately windy regions such as offshore locations, and hybrid systems to cover areas that receive equal amounts of sun and wind. Therefore we can maximize energy output by employing the most suitable energy source to utilize an area's natural resources.

I encourage the community to become active in the pursuit of an energy revolution. You can start by supporting wind development projects such as Hoosac Wind Project or Cape Wind in Cape Cod. Perhaps you might consider installing a small wind turbine or solar panels to cover the electricity needs for your own home. Anything you do to promote the growth of renewable energy sources is a step closer to a world free of foreign oil wars, nuclear disasters, and pollution.

DANA DRUGMAND

Washington, April 2, 2005

EnXco resolved to complete wind project

April 5, 2005 | North Adams Transcript (MA)
Author: Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript | Section: Today's Headlines | 461 Words
OpenURL Link

FLORIDA -- The Hoosac Wind project, a proposed 20-wind turbine wind farm, has been rescheduled for completion in 2006, a company spokesman announced.

The project previously was expected to be up and running in 2005 to take advantage of a federal renewable energies tax incentive.

The wind farm is proposed by the California-based company enXco and was slated for construction starting in the spring. Several appeals by 10 Florida residents forced the project to reschedule. Eleven turbines are proposed for Florida's Bakke Mountain and nine for Monroe's Crum Hill.

EnXco spokesman Sam Bittman came to the Florida Selectmen's meeting on Monday to tell local officials that the company is dedicated to finishing the wind farm.

'Strongly committed'

"EnXco remains extremely, strongly committed," Bittman said.

"There are a lot of people on the team who are working, so it goes forward," said Bittman. "We understand appeals are part of the process and we will ride this one out."

Bittman said the change was "a little less than we'd love," and would make the wind project ineligible for the federal tax incentive, which expires at the end of the year. Still, he said people should dispel any thought that enXco's commitment would wane because of the delays, and said the company was confident it will win the appeal.

Bittman said there is a good chance the tax credit would be extended to 2006, but added that the enXco team plans to complete the project with or without it.

He said the new timetable will require five to six months for a ruling from the state Division of Administrative Law Appeals, an independent adjudicating body. DALA will take four months to examine all evidence and documents, and a site visit will be planned for the next few weeks. Bittman said the hearing will be on Aug. 16-18.

After that, DALA should come out with its ruling within 30 to 60 days, Bittman said.

If that ruling is not appealed, construction could begin in October this year, said Bittman, although the new construction schedule has inescapably slipped into the next calendar year.

Growth in the wind industry has increased demand for turbine parts and caused a bottleneck for construction materials, Bittman said. The shortage in supply also factored in to reassessing the schedule, he said.

In November 2004, the group of Florida residents appealed the local conservation commission's order of conditions to allow the wind farm. The case went to the state Department of Environmental Protection, which approved the project with new conditions.

That ruling was appealed by the Florida group to DALA. Now the appellants have legal backing through the nonprofit Green Berkshires, which opposes all wind projects in the Berkshires, and are bolstered by a group of 36 Berkshire residents who joined the appeal in public opposition to the project.

- **Citation (aglc Style)**
  Ben Rubin North Adams Transcript, 'EnXco resolved to complete wind project', *North Adams Transcript* (online), 5 Apr 2005 ‹https://infoweb.newsbank.com/apps/news/document-view?p=WORLDNEWS&docref=news/1094BC7F1349580C›

Florida wind project hits legal headwind

April 1, 2005 | Berkshire Eagle, The (Pittsfield, MA)
Author: Christopher Marcisz Berkshire Eagle Staff | Section: Headlines | 555 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 yesterday 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.

Christopher Marcisz can be reached at cmarcisz@berkshireeagle.com or at (413) 664- 4995.