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Area near Bird Island touted as 'sweet spot' that could improve opportunities for energy

By [Tom Cherveney](#), West Central

Tribune

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REDWOOD FALLS — Thanks to the Southern Minnesota Beet Sugar Cooperative, the community of Renville can boast of being the sweetest spot in Renville County.

But investors with Norfolk Wind Energy LLC have found another "sweet spot" in the county. This one is near Bird Island, and it too could mean economic opportunity for the county.

A distributive energy study by the Minnesota Department of Commerce completed last year identified the electrical transmission substation there as one of many "sweet spots" in the state. These are sites where electrical power could be added to the transmission grid without requiring major improvements in lines or equipment.

Overall, the study found sites to add 600 megawatts of electricity to the existing grid without the need for new lines, according to George Crocker of the North American Water Office. The power can be added

at substations scattered throughout much of Minnesota south of U.S. Highway 12. Anywhere from 10 megawatts to 40 megawatts can be added at any one site.

The study found 40 megawatts of capacity available at Bird Island. Norfolk Wind is now working with a developer, National Wind of Minneapolis. It intends to raise capital and erect turbines to produce exactly that much power. Its targeted area

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for the wind turbines includes much of Norfolk Township of Renville County.

David Schiebel, president of Norfolk Wind, said the company was launched by 10 investors in the fall of 2007.

He had attended a renewable energy forum conducted by the county's Economic Development Agency, and learned that wind monitoring had shown there was a commercially developable wind resource in the county.

Schiebel owns Market Wise Ag of Bird Island, which helps farmers market their products. He said he has always been interested in rural economic opportunities and saw wind as one to pursue. He said the original investors quickly discovered how difficult it can be to launch a wind power project. "The whole process seemed like herding cats," he said.

The project found its direction — and a partner in National Wind— when the state's distributive energy study was completed and the Bird Island "sweet spot" was identified.


"That is what is allowing our project to go forward," said Schiebel.

National Wind is committed to community-owned wind power projects, according to Katie Clark, its community affairs director.

The company has 13 projects representing a potential for 4,000 megawatts of electricity in development right now, including the Lakes Country Wind project in Kandiyohi County.


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