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## Wind farms need closer look, Mollohan says

By **Paul J. Nyden**  
Staff writer

Rep. Alan Mollohan, D-W.Va., believes state officials should take a closer look at the impact windmill farms will have on areas in West Virginia that are major tourist attractions.

Huge turbines are already operating in the Allegheny Mountains on wind farms in Grant and Tucker counties.

Mollohan believes the state needs to take a closer look at all aspects of the economic and human impact of the new industry.

"These are serious public questions," Mollohan said during a telephone interview on Friday.

"Our Legislature and our executive ought to fashion the framework within which we allow wind farms to be sited and built. There may be places where there are no problems. On the other hand, wind turbines may detract from special viewshed areas.

"Do we really want to replace our woods-lined vistas with windmills? Local residents have answered that question on Cape Hatteras and Cape Cod. They are fighting them like mad."

Mollohan and Rep. Nick J. Rahall, D-W.Va., have asked the congressional Government Accountability Office to do a cost-benefit analysis about the impact of wind power.

"What are the benefits to West Virginia, and to the nation? Do wind farms make a significant contribution to energy production?" Mollohan asked.

"How do wind farms affect our growing tourist industry? How are they taxed? Is taxing windmills at salvage values a smart policy?" Mollohan asked.

Today, wind power producers benefit from two West Virginia tax breaks:

- Property taxes on turbines and towers are based on their "salvage value," just 5 percent of their original cost.
- Business and occupation taxes are based on 5 percent of the value of energy produced on wind farms. Other new electricity-generating facilities pay B&O taxes based on 40 percent of generating capacity.

"All these questions should be answered. I am advocating a policy of discussion and debate among our policy makers," Mollohan said.

### Evolution of wind power

Wind power farms first appeared in the early 1980s, according to the American Wind Energy Association, an industry group.

Their production of electric power expanded from 10 megawatts in 1981, to 1,525 megawatts in 1990, then 2,578 megawatts in 2000. By January 2005, production reached 6,740 megawatts.

Nearly 70 percent of that production came from four states: California, Texas, Iowa and Minnesota. West Virginia wind farms generated 66 megawatts last year, 13th highest of any state, according to the AWEA.

But wind energy contributes only a tiny proportion of all energy generated in the United States.

In 2003, wind energy represented barely more than one-tenth of 1 percent of all energy consumed in the United States, according to the federal Energy Information Administration.

By 2025, EIA predicts, wind energy will represent a little more than one-third of 1 percent of all energy consumed.

Mollohan believes West Virginia must take a close look at the long-term impact of huge wind farms.

"The old system of allowing resources to be exploited without protecting the state and ensuring we are not left with all the liabilities — that was foolish.

"You are left with acid mine drainage, clear cutting and erosion, underground acid mine drainage and human legacies, including black lung and hurt bodies.

"When you have a natural-resource-rich state, you need to fashion policies to ensure liabilities do not become enduring legacies," Mollohan said.

"In the past, we allowed coal, oil, natural gas and timber to be exploited. In recent decades, we have corrected, or made great strides in correcting, policies that surround the use of those resources so they contribute to our economy and do not create lingering liabilities.

"When we look at new opportunities associated with our natural resources and our terrain, we need to be mindful of that history and ensure that the exploitation aspects are not repeated.

"Shame on us if we allow them to be repeated," Mollohan said.

Questions remain

Mollohan said he tried, unsuccessfully, to get the state's Public Service Commission to look more carefully at data and statistics about wind power.

"The Public Service Commission ought to explain why they are approving all these projects. They cannot say it is cheap energy. It is not cheap energy.

"And they cannot say wind power makes a significant contribution to the electrical grid. That is not true," Mollohan said.

Most of the capital paying to build wind farms comes from other states and other countries.

"Is this a model we want to replicate again without a serious debate of what liabilities we are creating? Even if there were some benefits to West Virginia, how many jobs are really associated with wind farms?"

Mollohan also worries about the dangers wind turbines pose to birds and bats, including endangered species. "We will decimate the bat population," he said.

Linda Cooper, who lives in Morgantown, is president of Citizens for Responsible Wind Power, a group that also raises many of these questions.

Cooper said many local residents are disturbed by the noise huge turbines make, such as the 44 wind turbines on Backbone Mountain in Tucker County.

Cooper's group published newspaper ads in The Grant County Press and in The Parsons Advocate last week that quoted one resident who said, "The noise they make travels miles and miles down the mountains and hollows, disturbing people who cannot even see them from their homes."

Mollohan said, "No one is against all wind farms. But there are appropriate places and inappropriate places. They may be fine out on the plains of Texas and the Midwest.

"But we wanted a moratorium, which the PSC did not approve, until we can resolve these issues."

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