

Military concerns force DOE to cancel Nevada wind project

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The National Nuclear Security Administration scrapped a 325-turbine wind farm project planned for the Nevada Test Site late last week, citing potential problems with nearby Nellis Air Force Base.

NNSA Nevada Operations Office spokesman Darwin Morgan said the Air Force expressed concern that the proposed turbines would interfere with its fighter pilot training as well as cause problems with its radar system. There are no new plans for the site at this point, he said, although the NTS Development Corp. continues to work on the site's future.

Nellis spokesman Michael Estrada said training takes place on the 3-million-acre range that "can't be done anywhere else in the world." He said the large blades of the wind turbines "are perfect jammers" for radar systems. Edwards Air Force Base in California learned firsthand of wind turbines' effect on radar from a nearby wind farm, and the base can no longer do radar tests, Estrada said.

The Energy Department started the wind project at the tail end of the Clinton administration. Once complete, the site was set to produce 260 megawatts (MW) of wind power, or enough to supply 260,000 people. DOE expected the first phase of the three-phase project to be complete by 2001, with 120 turbines in place. That would supply 85 MW to 85,000 people in Nevada and California. However, the process took longer than anticipated and the project was only in its National Environmental Policy Act evaluation when it was canceled.

DOE was not paying for the facility, but agreed to a sub-easement for 664 acres of land 65 miles northwest of Las Vegas (Greenwire, Jan. 18). Siemens Energy and Automation; the Danish firm NEG Micon, through its development company Global Renewable Energy Partners; and BP Capital were all part of the project. Calls were not returned by the companies by press time.

Nevada Sen. Harry Reid's (D) spokeswoman, Tessa Hafen, said the secretary of the Air Force discussed the issues with the senator last week, and some of the reasons behind the cancellation are confidential. She said the senator will still be working to make sure a wind farm project continues somewhere in the state.

American Wind Energy Association spokeswoman Christine Real de Azua said the project's cancellation was "just a shame." There are no government projects planned right now that could make up for the lost wind power generation, but discussions are still taking place on a variety of proposals, she said.