

Another wind power project planned on Highland border

BY ANNE ADAMS • STAFF WRITER

FRANKLIN, W.Va. — A wind facility is in the works in Pendleton County, W.Va., as proposed by U.S. Wind Force, LLC, of Wexford, Pa. The company's president and chief operating officer Tom Matthews told The Recorder Monday an application for a permit was submitted last week to the Public Service Commission of West Virginia, which issues a "certificate of public convenience and necessity" to all manner of businesses and utilities in that state. Getting the permit can take months, and depends on the process, which includes public hearings, he said. While he could not predict what public sentiment will be, "I sense a tremendous amount of support." All three county commissioners and a commissioner-elect in Pendleton were unanimous in their support as well, he said.

U.S. Wind Force's project is planned for the ridge along Jack Mountain, entirely in Pendleton but very near Highland County's border with West Virginia in the Doe Hill area. Matthews said the facility will be the single largest source of tax revenue for Pendleton once built, but could not estimate what that amount might be until later. West Virginia's formula for calculating that tax revenue, a business and occupancy tax, was complicated, Matthews explained, and depended on how much a project produces.

U.S. Wind Force is leasing property for its turbines from a handful of landowners and the "royalties" for the landowners are a good source of revenue, Matthews said, though he declined to say how much the company pays for its leases.

He also said it would create a handful of permanent full-time jobs after construction, and a number of ancillary businesses.

Matthews said the turbines at Liberty Gap could be anywhere from 320 to 413 feet in height at the tip of the blade in the 12 o'clock position, with towers about 213 to 262 feet high, but won't know exactly until a model of turbine is chosen. And depending on the type used, the plant could generate 70 to 100 megawatts, he said, with up to 50 turbines. He expects there would not be more than 50 erected, and it's likely fewer would be needed.

U.S. Wind Force intends to use local labor for construction where possible, though some construction processes require specialized skills. "We favor using skilled trades in West Virginia," he said, adding that "one of the things we pride ourselves in" is being sensitive to the environment. "If we're going to put up an environmentally friendly (plant), we're going to be green from the ground up. We want to make sure we don't impact wetlands, vegetation,

species ... We design around those areas."

The total acreage of the project was unclear at this point, he said, but will probably span hundreds of acres. Matthews emphasized the project would probably only disturb about 2 percent of the land area the company leases.

As for whether U.S. Wind Force plans to expand the project into Highland County, Matthews said, "We're always looking for wind sites that make sense." He said he wasn't sure where HNWD's project was in the local process, but "a lot of people have their eye on what the reaction (of residents and officials here) will be. I'm hoping Highland County sees the benefits," he said, citing local revenues, jobs and ultimately, clean air. "There are always people who don't like them," he added, saying reaction runs the whole gamut.

Matthews hopes wind energy development will come to Virginia, saying there is good wind potential here, and good wind in Highland. "I think there could be strong potential for wind projects in the county."

For those here still trying to decide how they feel about wind development, Matthews says, "I hope they look at the big picture. I know of no method of generating electricity — coal, gas, nuclear, wind, solar — any of those forms, that doesn't require something to be built." He asks people to weigh the pros and cons. Wind energy, he said, is pollution-free, and helps to prevent other kinds of environmental damage like acid rain. "It also uses a source of fuel that no one can ever take away," he said, and will "lessen our dependence on foreign sources of fuel. This kind of fuel is free. God willing, it will be there forever. It won't get used up and be gone." He wants people to think about the greater good for the country, noting that Virginia, and this particular portion of the state, has a resource no one knew existed 20 years ago. At the very least, he says, if a person's issue is simply aesthetics, they should drive to one of the other projects and see them. "But don't dislike them if you've never seen them."

As for the large bat kills that have been found at a couple of West Virginia projects by other developers, Matthews says his company and others are deeply concerned about what's causing certain bats to fly into the turbines. "This is something we need to understand more of," he said, noting the American Wind Energy Association and many companies are donating funds to study the issue. Once experts determine why it's happening, he said, a way to deter the problem can be found. "That's my hope," he said, "but there's not enough data. We as a developer want to know (why it's happening) just as badly."

© Nov. 26, 2004, Anne Adams, Recorder Publishing of Va. Inc.

Jack Mountain may get 50 turbines

FRANKLIN, W.Va. — U.S. Wind Force's application for a permit to construct and operate a wind facility in Pendleton County states it intends to construct and operate the plant, dubbed "Liberty Gap," for wholesale wind power, and will have an agreement with the PJM regional transmission organization, which would govern the connection at Allegheny Power's Franklin substation.

U.S. Wind Force intends to build a 138 kilovolt transmission line to carry the power to Franklin, and related facilities, according to the application notice. Near each turbine may be a step-up transformer depending on turbine model design, and the project will also include access roads, transmission lines connecting the turbines,

communication lines, new and/or upgraded substation(s), an operation and maintenance facility, and the overhead 138 kv line to connect the plant to the Allegheny Power system.

The project would be on the ridge of Jack Mountain, about 10 miles south of Franklin, constructed primarily on a 5,000-acre tract of land owned by Allegheny Wood Products, Inc. and two smaller, privately owned tracts.

The notice states U.S. Wind Force estimates the total cost of the facility will be \$100 million to \$120 million, and hopes to begin construction in May of next year, operating by the end of 2005.

— Anne Adams