

## **Wind firm delays Pendleton project**

By Jim Balow  
Staff writer

A proposed wind power project in Pendleton County has been delayed, at least temporarily, its developers have announced. US Wind Force LLC of Pittsburgh has asked the state Public Service Commission to withdraw its Nov. 16 application to build up to 50 electricity-generating wind turbines on Jack Ridge, about 10 miles south of Franklin.

However, in a news release, company president Tom Matthews said its Liberty Gap Wind Force LLC subsidiary plans to resubmit the application by the end of March and remains committed to the project.

“The withdrawal of the applications will provide additional time to complete the extensive environmental, avian, bat and wildlife studies necessary for review by the PSC,” Matthews said in a prepared statement. “The substantial amount of data that must be provided for a project like this has taken longer to prepare than was expected.”

Liberty Gap had asked the PSC to give its application an expedited review to help it get the wind project up and running by the end of 2005. Wind power projects across the country face the same deadline in order to qualify for lucrative federal production tax credits unless Congress acts to extend it.

In a joint staff memo earlier this month, however, PSC lawyer Leslie Anderson recommended the commission take the normal 270 days to consider the case. Anderson also sent the company a lengthy list of questions to answer by Dec. 27 – requests for things such as detailed maps, environmental data, wildlife studies, and noise and cultural effects.

On Dec. 10, Anderson sent a second list of questions. This list, also with a Monday deadline, included detailed requests for information about a proposed right-of-way for a nine-mile overhead transmission line the company plans to build to connect the wind towers to Allegheny Power’s North Franklin substation.

Matthews said Tuesday the company’s consultants were unable to complete the various studies in time to meet the timetable to build the project by the end of 2005. “I fully expect the project will be built in 2006,” he said. Asked if the project could be built then without extension of the federal tax credits, Matthews said, “That remains to be seen. I do expect the tax credits to be extended. If they are not, the market will have to adjust accordingly. That clearly will affect the economics of the project. Obviously it will reduce the number of equity investors interested in the project.”

Liberty Gap officials ran into problems at the county level earlier this month after county residents learned Pendleton County Commissioners quietly signed an agreement with the company in late November. Under the agreement, the commission said it would use the power of eminent domain, if needed, to acquire 100-foot-wide rights-of-way for the power line from private citizens and give them to the company.

Once news of the agreement surfaced, some residents formed a group called Friends of Beautiful Pendleton County to fight the project. Dozens of people attended and spoke out at a Dec. 7 county commission meeting

and, in a special meeting Dec. 10, commissioners rescinded their agreement with Liberty Gap. “We will continue to negotiate for the rights-of-way,” Matthews said. “It was always our intention to negotiate with individual landowners.” He said the company has alternative routes for the power line.

Robbie Sites, founder of Friends of Beautiful Pendleton County, said the group will hold another public meeting at 7 p.m. Jan. 10 in the Pendleton County High School gym. “There's still a mystery,” he said. “People don't know if it [the project] will net any money for the county. We're hoping to have a panel discussion on the 10th and have someone from the assessor's office explain the situation.”

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