

Wind is not the air apparent

By Bruce Waugh
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Industrial wind turbines are not your grandfather's windmills, and 8,000-acre industrial complexes are not wind farms. Rather, they are tax subsidy schemes driven by misleading claims that they will reduce pollution and shut down conventional plants.

Over the past 30 years, U.S. taxpayers have unsuccessfully pumped more than \$14 billion into research trying to make the giant structures cost-effective and efficient. Today, wind produces only three-tenths of 1 percent of our nation's electrical needs, and optimistic projections forecast that by 2025, less than 4 percent could be satisfied by wind. Westar has declared that wind-generated energy is, "simply not in the best economic interest of our customers and shareholders."

Industrializing the Kansas Flint Hills will cause significant environmental harm. The Flint Hills contain the vast majority of the remaining tallgrass prairie in North America – cattle still graze the same grasses that have grown there for thousands of years.

Scientists compare the environmental importance of the tallgrass prairie to that of the rain forest. Its roots act as a carbon sink, cleansing the air of pollution. Its plants and limestone soils purify rainwater. Per acre, it provides more environmental benefits than any other ecosystem in North America. However, scientists have warned that it is also our most endangered ecosystem, prompting groups that support renewable energy elsewhere, such as the Kansas Wildlife Federation, The Nature Conservancy, and Audubon of Kansas, to oppose wind turbines in the Flint Hills.

With its 400-foot turbines, heavy-duty roads and numerous power lines, the Elk River Project in Butler County will destroy 8,000 acres of tallgrass prairie and disturb another 12,000 acres of critical wildlife habitat. For this, taxpayers will provide the Scottish developer in excess of \$100 million in tax subsidies and benefits over 10 years. At the same time, the project will produce less than one-sixteenth of the energy that Wolf Creek produces. The Wall Street Journal sarcastically calls it Kyoto Capitalism.

Local benefits from the Elk River Project will be minimal. State law prohibits Butler County from collecting property tax on the project. The contractors and materials will come from out of state. The intermittent electricity produced will serve Missouri consumers, as Kansas is already a net exporter of electricity. Only a handful of permanent jobs will be created. No fossil fuel plants will be closed.

We would all like to find a clean, renewable answer to our energy needs. Wind turbines don't provide that answer. Europe, once gung-ho on wind energy, has learned an expensive lesson from its blind commitment to the technology. Beautiful and environmentally sensitive areas have been permanently destroyed, and none of the promised results have been achieved. Unfortunately, endorsements such as The Star's August 2 editorial help create a false sense of progress and fuel the fervor to continue in the wrong direction, all of which discourages us from wisely investing our resources to find real and lasting solutions. Even worse, wind complexes built in sensitive areas irreparably damage the very environment that they claim to protect.

Bruce Waugh is an attorney who lives in Kansas City and whose family has owned land in Wabaunsee County, Kansas, for four generations.