

Letters to the Editor

Shifting views on wind power

Dear Editor:

About 100 years ago, WESTVACO proposed to bring a pulp mill to Greenbrier County. The Hinton town fathers refused to allow it and every time the wind blows over from Covington I am thankful they took a stand on our behalf.

Now WESTVACO has joined with Invenergy from Chicago and proposes to clear the county's highest ridge tops and install 130 giant wind turbines 400' tall with blades nearly the wingspan of a 747 Jumbo Jet. Installing these "wind harvesting factories" will require hundreds of acres of Greenbrier County ridge tops to be cleared, graded, and kept barren by herbicide applications. Invenergy admits after the turbines are installed access to hunting and fishing in these areas will be denied. The noise from the turbines and the herbicide applications running off into the streams will no doubt impact a much larger area of the forest habitat. So it goes. Migrating birds and native bats best keep their distance as well, because this part of West Virginia will no longer be Wild and Wonderful.

We all use electricity and may feel a certain obligation to sacrifice our mountaintops in the name of clean energy. If only this project could deliver what it promises.

Representatives Rahall, and Mollohan have asked the congress to take a look at where this rush to wind power is going. Good for them. Mollohan notes "Heaven knows that West Virginia has always stepped up to the plate to contribute to our nation's energy security. But we now have a situation where speculators are staking claim to some of our most scenic areas and erecting these monstrosities that produce little

energy and are made possible only by a tax credit."

Maybe instead of hashing out this 20-year old debate one more time we should look to the European countries whose wind programs have been underway for some time. Denmark has the highest percentage of wind power plants, yet Danish electricity costs for the consumer are the highest in Europe. The Danish government has cancelled plans for three offshore wind farms planned for 2008 and has scheduled withdrawal of subsidies from existing sites.

In 1998, Norway commissioned a study of wind power and concluded that it has "serious environmental effects, insufficient production, and high production costs." Spain began withdrawing subsidies in 2002. Germany reduced the tax breaks to wind power, and domestic construction drastically slowed in 2004. Switzerland also is cutting subsidies as too expensive for the unrewarding benefit. The Netherlands decommissioned 90 turbines in 2004. Many Japanese utilities severely limit the amount of wind-generated power they buy, because of the instability they cause. (Remember electricity can't be stored, when the wind is too high or too low the turbines are useless.) In 2004 when Australia reduced the level of renewable energy that utilities are required to buy it dramatically slowed wind-project applications. A German agency study released in February 2005 stated that increasing the amount of wind power would increase consumer costs 3.7 times and that the theoretical reduction of greenhouse gas emissions could be achieved much more cheaply by simply installing filters on existing fos-

sil-fuel plants. The Irish grid manager made similar conclusions in February 2004.

We have a much less costly guaranteed effective way to meet our energy need—CONSERVATION! As an example, Country Guardian calculates that in the U.K. government subsidies for the construction of one wind turbine could instead be used to insulate the roofs of almost 500 houses that need it and save in two years the amount of energy the wind turbine might produce over its lifetime. And to add one more conservation example: According to the Natural Resources Defense Counsel if the U.S. could raise fuel efficiency standards on American cars by 7.7 miles/gallon we could eliminate 100% of Middle Eastern oil imports into this country.

The choice is ours and it is not too late. Invenergy representatives will be meeting with the public Tuesday night from 7-9 p.m., Oct. 11, at the Williamsburg Community Center next to the Fire House.

Note: information obtained from "A Problem With Wind Power" by Eric Rosenbloom—Sept. 16, 2005. Also see: <http://johnrsweet.com/Personal/Wind/index.html>.

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