

Two County Commissioners praise wind farm

By David Cottrill

"Personally, I find them (wind turbines) aesthetically appealing," said Greenbrier County Commissioner Brad Tuckwiler Tuesday during an exchange of views on the pro-



Dave Buhrman of Renick tells County Commission that the proposed wind farm in Greenbrier County would have a derogatory effect on tourism.

posed wind power project in the county. Tuckwiler recently visited the Buffalo Mountain Wind Energy Project in Tennessee, a year-old installation owned by Invenergy, the Chicago-based company seeking a permit to erect 124 towers in Northwest GREENBRIER COUNTY.

Tuckwiler said he saw abundant wildlife in the vicinity of the towers (squirrels and deer), and that there was very little noise.

Commission President Betty Crookshanks said she was "excited" about the prospect of having the turbines near her Rupert community. She speculated that, with new surface mines and wind mills, perhaps a TIF district (tax increment financing) could be established that would help the western end of the county.

Five members of Mountain Communities for Responsible Energy (MCRE) spoke in opposition to the installation of the 40-story giants on the ridges near Trout and Williamsburg.

"To give you some perspective," Dave Buhrman offered, "a county commissioner would be smaller than a quarter photographed next to one of these towers."

Buhrman stressed the potentially negative effects on the county's important tourist industry. "Mountain views millions of years in the making will be altered during one building season," he stressed. "When people can no longer get a sense that this area is wild, wonderful, and undisturbed, they will look elsewhere ... we are putting Greenbrier County's future eco-

NOMIC POTENTIAL AT RISK by allowing the wind industry access to our loftiest vistas."

John Walkup emphasized the potential depressing effect on land values for properties abutting the project. He gave an example of an 80 percent devaluation of a property adjacent to a Meyersville, PA plant.

He theorized that a ski resort similar to Snowshoe in Pocahontas County would be much more beneficial to the county, both in attracting visitors and providing permanent jobs.

"Potential benefits of the wind mills are overstated," charged Michael Rosolna "and the liabilities understated." He pointed to an issue of *West Virginia Wildlife* that named many bird species found in the Cold Knob vicinity, including the Bald Eagle. He insisted the area was an important migratory corridor and that rare birds would be threatened.

William Wold pointed to the danger to bats. "One bat catches 3,000 mosquitoes in a single night," he claimed. "They have a low reproductive rate and cannot sustain a consistently high mortality rate. Turbine promoters are rushing to get these machines in place before more independent studies expose them."

Rickie Peters said she was

AMAZON that the **FILING** COMPANY, Beech Ridge Energy, LLC, a subsidiary of Invenergy, is seeking waivers from regulatory control as a public utility. "If granted," she said, "there would be no inspection by the state of their project financing, net-income, operating revenues, depreciation, quality of service, promotional practices, uniform accounting requirements, books, papers, reports, etc."

In response to these criticisms, Beech Ridge Project Manager Dave Groberg said his company was not a utility selling power directly to citizens, but would sell instead to an eastern power grid, so should be free from normal utility regulation.

Groberg cited the virtues of clean, renewable energy and the rising demand for electric power, and said his company would become the county's fourth or fifth largest source of tax revenue.

He denied as "patently false" speculation that there was a "deal" with MeadWestvaco (owner of the land on which the towers are to be located) in which "green credits" earned by Beech Ridge would "allow MeadWestvaco to increase emissions at their plant in Covington."

He said the project would occupy only 500 acres of MeadWestvaco's 70,000 acre tract along the ridge tops. "It's

our goal to keep the turbines one mile from any private home," he said, "and (at that distance) there would be no shadow flicker ... flying ice ... or significant noise."

He held up a Tucker County



Invergy has only one hurdle to clear, and that is the state's Public Service Commission. Buhman said that entity has received 700 letters from concerned Greenbrier County citizens, only two of which were written in support of the initiative. He also said MCRE has petitioned the PSC to hold its hearing in Greenbrier County, rather than in Charleston, for the convenience of numerous interested parties.

Both Commissioners who spoke their positions on the project, Tuckwiller and Crookshanks, stressed that the Commission has no role in the permitting process since there is no county zoning in place.

Dave Groberg, Project Manager for Beech Ridge Wind Farm, refutes charges made by local citizens during an exchange before the Greenbrier County Commission.

visitors' guide which prominently displayed a wind mill on its cover, suggesting that the county's convention and visitors' bureau found them tourist friendly.

"What else are they going to do?" asked Rosolina after the meeting. "They're stuck with them. They have to try to turn them to their advantage."

"We conducted extensive wildlife impact studies in connection with the Beech Ridge Project," Groberg continued. "No endangered species have been sighted ... and there's no evidence of a footprint being within a flyway."

He also claimed that a Canaan Valley condo, within sight of the Tucker County turbines, had tripled in value in recent years. He further denied that his company would use herbicides to control growth