

**National Post** July 30/2007

**Wind power ardour cools** by Dakshana Bascaramurty

On the lush land along the north shore of Lake Erie and south shore of Lake Huron the fertile soil returns hundreds of tonnes of corn, barley and wheat, but lately a new kind of farm is sprouting up.

Alongside the expansive hectares of traditional crops, mammoth steel towers with spinning blades are springing up from concrete roots planted firmly in the soil.

Wind turbines dwarf everything around them – most are equipped with 40-metre blades and stand as high as the Peace Tower on Parliament Hill. The trend is no longer just one or two stray turbines scattered amid farmers' fields, but rather dozens of them clustered together in major power-generating operations across the countryside.

Canada has 77 wind farms, but that number is expected to rise to more than 100 with all the projects in the development stage or under negotiation for the next five years. Just last week, the first commercial wind project in Newfoundland and Labrador was launched.



Canada has 77 wind farms but the number is expected to rise to more than 100 over the next five years.  
Credit: Ted Rhodes  
CanWest News Service

Projects are picking up the most speed in Ontario, where the provincial government has embraced wind energy as a symbol of its green friendliness, and municipalities are signing on with a fervour because the province's above-market prices mean they can reap cash in land sales and tax revenues.

But as Canada experiences a rapid rise in these developments, there is a growing opposition to wind power as a clean energy alternative, with complaints that it is high-cost, energy-inefficient, causes noise pollution and even wreaks havoc on birds' migratory patterns.

After raising many of these concerns with the Ontario Municipal Board, residents of Wolfe Island, Ont., celebrated a victory this week when plans for an 86-turbine megaproject by Canadian Hydro Developers, Inc. was modified to place the turbines farther away from residential areas and wetlands.

Even Canadian singing icon Anne Murray has come out against wind power projects, complaining about what she regards as a blight on the landscape near her cottage on the Northumberland Strait: "We must do whatever it takes to preserve our precious coastline for generations to come," she wrote in a Halifax newspaper.

New York scientist Jesse Ausubel published the paper "Renewable and Nuclear Heresies" this week, criticizing wind farms – which he calls big industrial facilities – for the same reason

And **Energy Probe**, the consumer research organization bent on finding better energy alternatives, concedes there does not seem to be much promise in wind power.

Municipal governments have much to gain from the development of wind farms in their jurisdiction because property taxes are collected on wind farms.

The county of Chatham-Kent along the north shore of Lake Erie, for example, will collect about \$250,000 each year from Kruger Energy, which is developing a \$220-million farm with 44 turbines, said Rob Anderson, the county's agricultural co-ordinator of economic development. Companies such as Enbridge and Kruger Energy also lease land from landowners to set up their turbines, which means financial benefits for many living in rural areas.

After receiving many questions from farmers concerned about having their rights infringed on, the Ontario Federation of Agriculture sent a comprehensive notice to its members in April with information about dealing with wind-farm developers, said Gary Struthers, a spokesman for the federation. It recommended farmers settle for no less than \$5,000 each year for every 100 acres of land.

**Thomas Adams**, the executive director of Energy Probe, echoes the federation's advice: "Lots of [wind farms] have gone bankrupt. The first commercial wind farm in Canada – Le Nordais on the Gaspé in Quebec – was also the first to go bankrupt," he said.

Quebec-based Boralex and Toronto-based Gengrowth announced they are set to open nine farms – each of them with five turbines – in the counties of Essex and Chatham-Kent, in the southern-most part of the country near Windsor, Ont. Each farm is supposed to produce 10 megawatts of energy for a total of 90 megawatts on all farms – enough to power 18,000 homes, said Patricia LeMaire, a spokeswoman for Boralex.

David Lee is a retired engineer in Essex County who considered putting a turbine on his property in the 1980s when interest in the alternate source of energy was beginning to build. Further research convinced him otherwise. "Most people think it's wind blowing, it's free, it's going to reduce our power costs, but it's actually driven up our power costs," Mr. Lee said.

At 11¢ per kilowatt hour, compared to the price of hydroelectricity at 6¢ an hour, Mr. Adams agrees. "The cost of wind power for consumers has been rising as opposed to falling in Ontario. That's an important red flag," he said.

Even if it were cheaper, the reliability of wind power is questionable.

"How could you possibly take something as unreliable as wind and generate a reliable source of energy from it?" Mr. Lee asked.

David Timm, the Ontario policy manager for the Canadian Wind Energy Association, said the reliability problem is easily solved by spreading farms across the province, so that a windy day in one region offsets a calm day in another.

Mr. Adams pointed out that Canada's energy needs peak in the summer when air conditioners are humming, but when wind energy production is at its lowest.

He said wind power does very little to maintain grid reliability because it is difficult to forecast wind production even a few hours into the future.

Wind farms in Ontario reached only 21.5% of their capacity in 2006, said Terry Young, a spokesman for the Independent Electricity Systems Operator, which maintains Ontario's power grid.

While municipal leaders like Robert Bailey, deputy mayor of Amherstburg in Essex County, say wind turbines are appealing because they allow landowners to use their farmland right up to the tower, critics charge that the massive structures can come too close to homes.

Maureen Anderson, a member of the Essex County Wind Action Group, which sprung up in protest of the growing number of proposed developments, said the noise generated by the turbines is disruptive to homeowners, particularly at night.

Even the impact on animal populations is a concern. Conservationists in the Lake Erie region presented a strong enough case about the dangers to sensitive bird populations in Pelee Island that proposals for wind farms on the island have been rejected.

It is a claim being picked up by opponents of the latest spate of developments for the Windsor-Essex area.

"The north shore of Lake Erie is where major migration routes converge, and raptors seem to be most vulnerable to wind turbines," said Ms. Anderson. With bird migration as one of its considerations, Essex County has spent \$80,000 on a study to be released this fall of how more wind farms might affect the region.

"It's very hard to talk to people because it's almost politically incorrect to come out against wind farms," Ms. Anderson said. "The destruction of the landscape and destruction of the country . . . it's not worth the price for the piddly amount of power you get from these things."

The ckwag would like to add that municipalities need to consider, the substantial loss in property values of homes next to turbine developments, and the lost taxes as a result of these reductions in the values of the homes.

Furthermore, the turbine developments will halt future economic development within their immediate vicinity.