



Editorial: Breezing ahead

Wind-power projects could herald start of new energy industry

Saturday, January 16, 2010 2:53 AM

This year could tell a lot about the future of wind power in Ohio, both in the number of projects proposed and in how they're received by the public.

The latter half of 2009 brought applications for five proposed wind-farm projects before the Ohio Power Siting Board, plus notification of a sixth to come soon. The activity is a welcome sign that the alternative-energy requirement enacted by the legislature in 2008 is having its desired effect: prompting new energy enterprises in Ohio.

Whether the wind portion of Ohio's energy portfolio goes from something near zero to a significant contribution will depend not only on the economy and energy markets, but whether Ohioans in windy places will accept 500-foot tall turbines as neighbors.

The proposed Buckeye Wind Project, which would put about 70 turbines in Champaign County and generate up to 175 megawatts, faces opposition from neighbors worried about the appearance and noise of the turbines, as well as whether the occasional "shadow flicker," which occurs when the sun is in a certain position relative to a wind turbine, is harmful.

Officials on the power-siting board and in wind-prone counties including Champaign, Hardin, Paulding, Van Wert, Crawford and Richland, will have a big influence on whether Ohio can find the way to a profitable wind-energy industry that helps the state reduce its reliance on coal and oil.

Some counties and townships may need to develop new codes and rules to manage the unprecedented investment as well as demands that wind farms could bring. In other states, counties have instituted per-megawatt development fees to help pay for and maintain the infrastructure wind farms need.

The Hardin County Board of Commissioners last month issued a vote of confidence in the wind industry. The panel secured the Ohio Department of Development's approval for a \$3.7 million stimulus-fund loan to help build a distribution center for the turbine components that will come to the state as wind projects are approved.

If the state Controlling Board approves the loan, American Rail Center, developer of the project, will contribute \$1.2 million, for a total cost of \$4.9 million.

Wind turbines, some as tall as 500 feet, aren't your average piece of machinery. The blades that the wind pushes can be 65 to 130 feet long. Special equipment and buildings will be necessary to move and house them; roads may have to be improved to accommodate the transport.

While all of this will require investment, it also could be the spark for more economic activity -- in rural western Ohio, where the wind farms would be, or any place that could house a factory for turbines or related parts.

The Hardin County distribution-center project promises 25 permanent jobs to start, but developers hope for more later. Eventually, they want to manufacture and assemble turbines at the site.

Countless politicians and alternative-energy advocates have talked of the manufacturing renaissance and other economic benefits that new energy technologies could bring to Ohio.

2010 may be the year it starts.