

Wind Turbines are Part of the Solution but a Small Part

And, while I agree with Mr. Shutkin that wind power, as a source of clean and renewable energy, should and will play a role in our future energy portfolio, its role will necessarily be small because of its fundamental limitation as an energy source: wind power is 'intermittent', i.e. it provides energy only when the wind blows, and, as such, wind power is a source of supplemental, not 'base load' energy.

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In last Spring's issue of Northern Woodlands William Shutkin ('Regarding Wind') posed a poignant question with respect to the 'hard choices' we all face regarding future energy sources, i.e. 'how do individuals and, by turn, communities make pattern-changing decisions, in both public policy and personal attitudes, to shift from the status quo to a better, more just, and more environmentally sound future?' And, while I agree with Mr. Shutkin that wind power, as a source of clean and renewable energy, should and will play a role in our future energy portfolio, its role will necessarily be small because of its fundamental limitation as an energy source: wind power is 'intermittent', i.e. it provides energy only when the wind blows, and, as such, wind power is a source of supplemental, not 'base load' energy.

Furthermore, depending on location, wind power can pose significant costs to our environment, economy and quality-of-life. These costs are responsible for the growing opposition to wind power where it is most prevalent. As noted in an article appearing in London's Telegraph (4/4/04) entitled 'Huge Protests by Voters Force Continent's Governments to Rethink So-called Green Energy', the governments of Denmark, Germany, France, Holland and the UK are reevaluating the role of wind power in their respective energy portfolios. This article includes a statement by Clive Aslet, editor of Britain's prestigious Country Life magazine, that addresses succinctly the dilemma posed by wind power- "as our continental neighbors have discovered, and we in the UK are quickly learning, the infrastructure costs needed to support wind power generation appear to hugely outweigh the advantages. It provides a trickle of green energy but is against all the principles of sustainable development".

We would do well to avail ourselves of the 'lessons learned' by those more experienced and knowledgeable than we are before proceeding apace with wind power. Importantly, this would enable us to craft energy policies that address wind power's pitfalls and that limit implementation to locations where wind power's benefits clearly outweigh its costs.

Finally, as Mr. Shutkin suggests, it is our civic duty to address the 'hard choices' posed by current energy sources to our environment. And there are things we can do: namely, we can all insist (and vote accordingly) that our political leaders promulgate policies that reduce emissions at their source (primarily transportation vehicles and coal burning plants) and that promote natural gas and conservation.

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