

Moratorium on wind power needed

March 19, 2004 by Hugh Kemper in The Manchester Journal

This letter replies to Putney resident John Berkowitz's letter entitled "Vermont can benefit from wind power," which appeared in the Manchester Journal on March 12 [[click here](#)]. Mr. Berkowitz argues against a three-year moratorium on wind power in Vermont and in favor of wind power because it will (1) help Vermont and America stop and reduce global warming, (2) help our economy by providing construction and permanent jobs, (3) help secure our energy future, and (4) help our wildlife. Finally, Mr. Berkowitz urges us "to learn more about the issue."

On this last point, we agree. All Vermonters need to become engaged in the wind power debate. That is why we need a three-year moratorium on wind power. A moratorium, which would delay but would not necessarily stop construction, would provide an opportunity for all Vermonters to get the facts and to make an informed decision. Importantly, a moratorium would provide Montpelier with an opportunity to formulate an energy plan for Vermont that is both responsive to the state's long-term energy needs and consistent with Vermonters' environmental concerns.

The wind power debate is not about wind power's credentials as a source of clean, renewable energy. This is an indisputable fact. The debate is about whether wind power makes sense for Vermont, i.e., whether the advantages of wind power in Vermont outweigh its disadvantages. From my perch, for Vermont, wind power's disadvantages considerably outweigh its benefits. Let's look at wind power in Vermont:

(1) Vermont's wind power capacity is small (Vermont ranks 32nd among states in wind resources) for the simple reason that there are a limited number of ridgelines in Vermont deemed suitable for wind power. Wind power currently contributes a fraction of 1 percent to Vermont's energy needs. Taking current wind power proposals into account, wind power could account for only 1 percent to 2 percent of Vermont's electrical power. Vermont's energy consumption, in turn, is small when compared to that of our more industrialized neighboring states. In short, wind power in Vermont will not meaningfully increase Vermont's or New England's energy supplies.

(2) Wind power is, at best, a supplement to, not a substitute for, current energy sources. Wind power is intermittent, i.e., it is available only when the wind blows. Traditional and more reliable sources of energy will remain in place.

(3) Wind power in Vermont will not affect the major sources of global warming, which is caused principally by transportation emissions and Midwest coal-burning plants. Nor will Vermont wind power eliminate acid rain, which also blows in from the Midwest.

(4) Huge towering and expansive wind plants in Vermont will alter drastically the scenic beauty of our ridgelines, will illuminate the night sky, and will disrupt wildlife habitats and migration patterns.

(5) Wind power in Vermont will not contribute meaningfully to Vermont's economy and may, in fact, significantly damage it. While it is true there are large construction costs, only about 20% of these will (or more accurately, may) be spent in Vermont. Most of the construction costs will be spent outside the state on the required technology. Furthermore, there will be few, if any, permanent jobs. While requiring periodic maintenance, wind power facilities are essentially unmanned. [One or two technicians could probably cover the whole state. --ER] More importantly, wind power poses a very serious threat to tourism, a critical component of Vermont's economy, as well as to property values.

(6) While it is true wind power facilities will pay their share of taxes per the Grand List, it is also true the savings to taxpayers is diminutive. For example, should the Glebe Mountain project proceed, the estimated savings would be only \$50 per parcel per year for the owners of Londonderry's approximately 1,600 parcels. Given Londonderry's budget concerns, there is no guarantee that Londonderry residents will pay lower taxes in the future. The residents of Londonderry's neighboring towns receive no tax benefits.

While some wind power proponents will concede that wind power in Vermont is not a solution to global warming, acid rain, and/or Vermont's or New England's energy costs or supplies, they argue that Vermont, the environment state, needs to 'set an example' and 'do its share.' They argue that such a symbolic gesture is important. In truth, the opposite is the case. Vermont, as the leader in environmental protection, should know when to say no; i.e., to say no to an energy source which offers marginal benefits at best when weighed against its significant threats to the very environment Vermont is supposedly dedicated to preserving. When the threat posed by wind power to our environment is added to the threat posed by wind power to our tourist-based economy and the quality of our lives, 'symbolic' gestures for an otherwise noble cause simply make no sense.

Wind power is the most critical environmental issue currently facing Vermont. It is also a critical economic and quality-of-life issue for Vermont as a whole and very definitely for the towns where wind power is sited. And there is no reason to rush ahead. As mentioned above, wind power will not replace existing, more reliable sources of energy. These energy sources will remain available for the foreseeable future. This is why a moratorium makes sense.

Last week, the Glebe Mountain Group (of which I'm a member) sponsored an ad that urged area residents to support a petition in favor of a three-year moratorium on all wind power projects in Vermont. This petition effort is currently under way. By signing this petition, you will be joining your neighbors in sending a clear message to Montpelier that you need time to study the facts and make an informed decision.

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