

Tourism and Industrial Wind Turbines

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December, 2004 by Hugh Kemper in Manchester Journal (VT)

Opponents of industrial wind turbines on Glebe Mountain are indebted once again to the vigilance of the Burlington Free Press (Rethinking Tourism, Dec 2nd Opinion page) for including wind turbines among the potential threats to Vermont's tourist industry which employs one out of every five working Vermonters. The BFP has addressed the prospective impact of wind turbines on Vermont several times over the past year (e.g. The Business of Wind on 2/29/04 and Let the Wind Blow Free on 5/26/04). The aforementioned opinion was occasioned by the recent comments of Jonathan Tourtellot, director of sustainable tourism for the National Geographic Society, to attendees of Vermont Travel Industry's 22nd annual conference. Tourtellot's message was clear-preserving Vermont's unique and unspoiled character is good for business.

National Geographic research suggests, according to Tourtellot, that tourists are increasingly seeking unspoiled views, cultural arts, local crafts, specialty cuisine and original architecture. As the character and authenticity of more and more heretofore pristine travel destinations is spoiled by development, Vermont should be well positioned to tap this lucrative and growing market- if Vermont preserves its unspoiled character. Tourtellot's research is consistent with the findings of the 'branding research' conducted in 1998 by Vermont's Department of Tourism and Marketing which found that Vermont's appeal is a special combination of beautiful scenery, a peaceful experience, outdoor fun and great amenities. The implications of Tourtellot's views are also consistent with a comment on 3/30/04 made by Vermont's neighbor Bill Wilson (Berkshire Visitors Bureau) before the Berkshire Regional Planning Commission, i.e. wind turbines will not put "heads in beds" (Wind Turbines Don't Make Good Neighbors, Eleanor Tillinghast).

The direct linkage between the preservation of area character and tourism should be a critical concern for Glebe area residents. It is indisputable that the wind turbines would dramatically change the character of the affected view shed- virtually all of Londonderry's neighboring towns including Stratton and Bromley Mountains. Jean Vissering, the noted landscape architect, has described the proposed construction of 27 lighted turbines, each at least 330' tall, along 3.5 miles of Glebe's ridgeline as an 'in your face' industrial site which will 'define the town'. It is also indisputable that the area defined by the Glebe view shed is one of the premier tourist destinations of Southern Vermont which, in turn, accounts for 26% of Vermont's tourist revenues. According to UVM's Tourism Data Center (2001 data), this 26% market share is comprised of Southwestern Vermont (16%-Bennington, Manchester, Bromley, etc) and Southeastern Vermont (11%-Brattleboro, Mt. Snow, Stratton, etc) which rank respectively #1 and #3 among Vermont's 12 'tourist' areas.

Tourism is, of course, only one of the many wind turbine related issues that needs to be fully vetted. That said, tourism's economic importance makes it one of the most critical. As such, a heartfelt thank you to the BFP for addressing this issue in such a thoughtful and measured manner.

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