

WHAT ARE THE CUMULATIVE AFFECTS OF INDUSTRIAL WIND

TURBINES IN THE MOUNTAINS?

By Larry Thomas

In his State of the Union Address, President Bush addressed our nation's dependence on foreign oil by announcing the Advanced Energy Initiative, a 22 percent increase in clean-energy research at the Department of Energy, pushing for breakthroughs in two vital areas. First, to change how we power our homes and offices through more investment in zero-emission coal-fired plants, revolutionary solar and wind technologies and clean, safe nuclear energy and second to change how we power our automobiles through increased research into better batteries for hybrid and electric cars, and into pollution-free cars that run on hydrogen.

Those are necessary, but I kept waiting to hear one more initiative. Projections for the increases in energy consumption by the year 2030 are staggering. What I was hoping to hear was an initiative to provide for research into and then education of the public in ways to reduce energy consumption. The subject has not appeared in many of the articles that I have found concerning our requirement for energy in the future. We just seem to seek and to fund methods to produce more.

Part of the proposed change in how we power our homes and offices includes greater investment in revolutionary solar and wind technologies. The Mid-Atlantic Region, including the State of West Virginia, is experiencing the investment in wind technology through a large number of industrial wind turbine project placements throughout the region, applications filed for additional projects and many more on the drawing boards. It is estimated that in excess of 33,000 of the 1.5 Megawatt turbines are necessary to satisfy the Department of Energy goals and state mandated renewable portfolio standards for projected electric consumption in the region for the year 2030.

The West Virginia Public Service Commission is responsible for the review and approval or disapproval of applications for the siting of industrial wind turbine projects in the State of West Virginia. It has published siting application rules and requirements for these industrial projects. In addition, the Public Service Commission has made efforts to safeguard and protect the public interest with special provisions in licenses issued to such projects. While these are admirable efforts, these provisions are inadequate until all appropriate studies are completed concerning the cumulative affect of projects sited throughout the mountains.

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Currently licensed projects have had and will continue to have irreversible affects by destroying important wildlife and wildlife habitat (including endangered species), killing huge numbers of bats, destroying highly prized scenic vistas (the viewshed surrounding these projects extends for miles), They will have an impact upon local tourism-dependent economies (in West Virginia tourism is the fastest growing of any industry and in our mountains it is critical to local economies) and residents by impairment of property values, significant noise pollution created by the rotors and mechanical equipment for residents living in close proximity to the turbines and undue stress to the health and safety of residents living in close proximity of the turbines.

Many federal, state and local officials are extremely concerned with the cumulative affect of siting thousands of these industrial wind turbines in the Mid-Atlantic Region and are proposing moratoriums on future construction to provide time necessary for the completion of all required studies of the cumulative effects of industrial wind power generators and projects on the environment, citizens, state and community economics and the cost effectiveness of wind power as an alternative energy source.

State agencies, which should be involved in these studies, are playing catch-up and by their own admission are not empowered to examine questions concerning these projects and their potential impacts. Even worse, the Public Service Commission is not required to seek the assistance of those same agencies in its review of a proposed project application and the required information provided therein.

It is time to face the tough questions and to find the answers concerning the cumulative affects of industrial wind turbines in our mountains and to determine their affect on the future of West Virginia.