



# The Country Today

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## Twists and turbines

*Wind-project developers must move through PR, regulation mazes*

By Jim Massey

Editor

**LENA/WINSLOW, ILL./BELMONT** — The debate about wind farms is heating up as energy companies accelerate renewable-energy projects throughout the Midwest.

Wisconsin and Illinois are somewhat in a wind farm catch-up mode to their neighbors in Minnesota and Iowa, where more wind turbines dot the landscape. But that could change soon, with more wind farms under construction and proposed in Illinois and Wisconsin.

Sixty-seven wind towers are being erected on farms between Winslow and Lena, Ill., where Wisconsin and Illinois-based EcoEnergy is constructing the EcoGrove Wind Farm. The company hopes to have the wind farm in service before the end of the year. Winslow and Lena are just south of Green County and the Wisconsin border.

A similar project is being considered between Belmont and Platteville in southwestern Wisconsin. EcoEnergy officials have been meeting with area residents to gauge interest and attempt to secure locations for another 67 turbines.

Both projects would produce enough energy to power about 26,800 homes. The cost of the EcoGrove project is estimated at \$200 million.

### Wind Farm Projects



Staff graphic by Kathy Nelson

It would generate 100 megawatts of electricity.

The Belmont-Platteville project is one of more than a half-dozen wind projects proposed in southern Wisconsin. Others in the works are near Randolph, Arlington, Brodhead, Cuba City, Darlington and in Monroe County.

EcoEnergy Wind Project Developer Curt Bjurlin said siting a wind farm is a big project, from taking wind measurements to determine whether there is a good potential for a project to visiting with community members to try to gain their support.

There are often permits to secure well in advance of construction, although state statutes stipulate that local

jurisdictions generally don't have authority to stand in the way of a wind project unless there are human health or safety concerns.

"Besides the wind turbines, you have wind-measurement towers, access roads, the electrical system that connects the towers, and you have a substation," Mr. Bjurlin said. "Along the way we have to get approvals from landowners and permits from towns, counties and the state. There are all kinds of studies required. It's a choreographed dance to put together one of these projects."

The construction phase often takes six months, depending on the project's size.



Photo by Jim Massey

The blades on the EcoGrove Wind Farm turbines are 135 feet long. EcoEnergy employees John Meyers, left, and Curt Bjurlin looked at some of the blades before they were installed on a tower.

### Closer to cities

Mr. Bjurlin said wind farms are sprouting up in Iowa, Minnesota and the Dakotas, where wind is more plentiful, but

there is also a push to build the turbines in Wisconsin and Illinois, which are closer to

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# Wind/ Landowners facing challenging decisions

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large population centers.

"You can have all the wind in the world, but without a transmission line, it's going to be difficult to transmit that power to market," Mr. Bjurlin said. "What Wisconsin has going for it is a fairly decent transmission system and a lot of demand for renewable power.

"What we're finding is there's no free lunch. In order to have a renewable or sustainable economy, we're going to have to make some sacrifices. More and more people are finding that installing wind energy in their area is a sacrifice they're willing to make."

## Winslow farmers buy in

Joe Blair, a dairy and grain farmer from Winslow, said he and his family thought long and hard about whether they wanted turbines on their land. They eventually agreed to have seven towers erected on their farms.

"I guess because of the long-term nature of the thing, we thought about it," Mr. Blair said. "We're going to be looking at them for a long time. We felt we were giving up something — maybe some privacy by letting someone come on our farm. But we think the grand cause is the right one. It's the right thing to do."

Mr. Blair said he and his family will be paid for having the towers on their farm, but he said the money wasn't the sole factor that went into their decision.

"It was a combination of everyone in the neighborhood seemingly being for it," he said. "It looked like the project was going to go whether we signed up or not. The (EcoEnergy) people have been very good to work with — all in all it's been a good experience so far."

Scott Kent, a Winslow grain farmer, said there was an opposition group early in the planning process, but he was convinced the wind farm is a good idea. He will have 10 turbines on the land he owns with his brother, Brock, and their wives, Deb and Mandy.

"It's a way for us to do our part for the energy thing," he said. "It also provides some

## Midwest Wind Energy Projects

(Installed megawatts for each state)

Iowa - 1,375

Minnesota - 1,366

Illinois - 736

Wisconsin - 327

Source: American Wind Energy Association

needed revenue for our taxing bodies in this area. It's been nice for the fire department, township and school district."

Mr. Kent said some opponents didn't like the idea of seeing wind turbines on the landscape and others wanted larger setback requirements. Some landowners within the 7,300-acre wind farm area decided not to have turbines placed on their land.

## Belmont-Platteville planning begins

EcoEnergy officials have begun the planning process for the Belmont-Platteville project but say construction is probably at least two years away. An informational meeting will be in Belmont sometime this fall to provide more information to area residents.

Belmont Town Board Chairman Todd Palzkill said some township residents aren't convinced the wind farm is a good idea.

"It's been kind of a mixture," Mr. Palzkill said about early reaction to the proposal. "We've been discussing things with lawyers about what we can and can't do. We know that (EcoEnergy) can put them wherever they want, but we have these mounds out here and we don't know how the public is going to go for putting turbines out by them."

The wind farm is proposed to stretch from the Belmont Mound on the east to the Platteville Mound on the west. The Belmont Mound is a 400-foot hill topped by an observation tower, with a state park and the First Capitol Historic Site located at its base. The 1,250-foot-high Platteville Mound is the site of the world's largest 'M' that signifies UW-Platteville's mining heritage.

"Some of the dairy farmers in the area are concerned



Photo by Jim Massey

One of the cement slabs for the 67 EcoGrove Wind Farm turbines was poured and nearly ready for a tower to be installed. About 300 yards of concrete are poured into each base.

about putting that much power through a line and the possibility of stray voltage," Mr. Palzkill said. "And the 'M' is very photographed. These mounds are something that have been there forever. You can't pick them up and move them somewhere. The towers you can build anywhere."

Platteville dairy farmer Calvin Wessel said his opinion about the project varies "depending on where (the towers are) put."

"(EcoEnergy) was given a map, and people didn't want towers in the green zone," Mr. Wessel said. "That green zone was laid out to protect the mounds. But from what I've seen, they're proposing that the towers be put where we don't want them."

Joel Streich of Platteville said he's been to several meetings where the wind farm was discussed.

"There's a lot of small town kind of bickering going on," Mr. Streich said. "What people down here think basically depends on who you talk to."

"My opinion is it's going to happen. I don't really lose any sleep over it. I'm just going to lay back and see

how it unfolds."

Mr. Streich said he is a wind energy proponent and wants to put up a personal wind tower on his property.

"EcoEnergy is not concerned the least about it going through," Mr. Streich said. "They're going full speed ahead with the engineering and preliminary work. (The local opposition) hasn't slowed them down."

Belmont grain farmer Leonard Klein said he doesn't know how many area people favor the wind farm. If the project comes to fruition, some of the wind towers would go on his land.

"When they have the public meeting, that's when we'll see who's for or against it," he said. "As far as I'm concerned it's a no-brainer — it's the cleanest and cheapest energy out there."

EcoEnergy Wind Project Associate John Meyers has been meeting with landowners and groups in the Belmont-Platteville area and trying to answer questions as they arise.

"Our policy as a company is that we would like as much total buy-in from the local community as possible," Mr. Meyers said. "We

could come in here like a big corporation and cram this down people's throats, but why would you want to build a project that way? There will always be opposition, whatever you're building. But you have to look at the big picture. There are a lot of financial benefits for the community."

Mr. Meyers said he hopes to arrange a tour of the Lena-Winslow project for Belmont-Platteville residents to allay some of their concerns.

Mr. Palzkill said a group of Amish farmers who live near the Belmont Mound are among those who have concerns about the project.

"They said they didn't necessarily want (a turbine) on their land, but they didn't think they had the right to oppose them being put on neighbors' land," Mr. Meyers said about his conversations with the Amish farmers.

## More projects in the works

Wind farm project owners EcoEnergy and Acciona are also planning phases two and three of the EcoGrove project, which could add another 70 to 100 turbines in Stephenson County, and a project near Cresco, Iowa, about 40 miles west of the Wisconsin border, that would include

as many as 135 turbines.

## Government policy uncertain

The short-term future of wind projects is in jeopardy because of a potential change in federal energy policy.

About \$500 million in investment and production tax credits will expire Dec. 31 unless Congress renews them. Wind power companies are saying they could put projects on hold until government's energy policy is more certain. Mr. Bjurlin said the production tax credit provides energy companies with a tax credit of 2.1 cents per kilowatt-hour of energy produced during the first 10 years of production.

Mr. Bjurlin said many people are starting to realize that the cost of doing business in this country's economy is tied to energy production.

"We can't do anything without some source of energy," he said. "If we are tied to the price of a barrel of oil, we're going to continue to be beholden to interests that are outside our country. Now that it's expensive to refine and extract a barrel of oil, Americans are really getting behind the concept of trying to tap into the energy we have here."

Jim Massey can be reached at [jimmasey@mhtc.net](mailto:jimmasey@mhtc.net).