

Wind energy can transform Nebraska

By MIKE ZAKRZEWSKI, Lincoln Journal Star • Posted: Thursday, October 10, 2013

If you live in Nebraska, chances are you have cursed the wind at some point in your life. Whether it has ruined a good day of fishing, blown your neighbor's leaves onto your front lawn or just messed up your hair on your way to work or church — we've all done it. And if you're a farmer or rancher like me, it's a safe bet you cuss the wind on a regular basis when you try to put up hay or irrigate your crops. The bad news is the wind isn't going away anytime soon. The good news is it's about to transform our great state.

GRANDE PRAIRIE WIND FARM

The Grande Prairie Wind Farm is a 400 megawatt wind farm in operation in Holt County, a region in north central Nebraska. The average wind speed in Holt County, measured at 80 meters, is 19 miles per hour. The prevailing wind direction is typically from the north and south. The Grande Prairie Wind Farm's footprint spans approximately 50,000 acres. The Grande Prairie project is well-elevated, very compatible with the establishment of wind turbines, and has received broad community support.

Wind energy has come a long way in a few short years. I'll bet you would be surprised to learn that wind energy costs now are about the same as clean coal. With environmental regulations coming down hard on fossil fuel-based energy production, carbon-free energy sources such as wind likely will become the lowest-cost option in the near future. While competitive pricing is important, there's a lot more to love about wind energy.

Wind energy costs now are about the same as clean coal.

TAX RELIEF:

This fall our Legislature is searching for ways to improve our state's tax structure. They have put together a great committee filled with very capable people, but without coming up with new sources of revenue, the best they'll be able to accomplish will be a tax shift, not real tax relief. Wind energy can provide that new revenue. I'm chairman of our landowners' group for the Grand Prairie Wind Energy project in northern Holt County. We're a 400-megawatt project that nearly is shovel-ready. We are hoping that the Nebraska Public Power District, which is voting on wind energy this week, will be a purchaser.* Once we're up and running, our project will provide about **\$2 million per year of local tax revenue**. That's a pretty large amount of revenue added to the pie; imagine what Nebraska's tax structure will look like when there are dozens of these projects up and running.

ECONOMIC STIMULUS:

A project our size will bring in nearly **400 workers** during the multiple years of the construction phase. Once it's built, it will create about **12 good-paying, permanent jobs**, many of them right in our local community. Lease payments to local landowners will be about **\$2 million** per year. Overall, it will be about a **\$700 million** capital outlay for the project. **These numbers would be impressive anywhere — they're absolutely life-changing in a rural area such as ours.** The beauty of wind energy production is that it takes up very little space on the ground, so agricultural production won't be affected at all.

*The Omaha Public Power District voted unanimously to purchase wind energy produced by the Grande Prairie Wind Farm on October 17, 2013.



ENVIRONMENTAL BENEFITS:

The environmental advantages of wind energy production are pretty obvious — **no carbon, no emissions**. We literally pull energy out of thin air. As transmission infrastructures grow and new technologies are adapted such as compressed-air storage and improved battery efficiencies, future energy portfolios will be able to rely on this amazingly clean source at even greater levels.

We're at a crossroads as a state. We have tremendous wind resources and we have willing communities ready to embrace an era of wind energy production. What we need now is for our state's public power districts to commit to wind energy as more than a token addition to their portfolios. At NPPD's October board meeting this coming week, they will be deciding whether to purchase wind energy now while it's priced at historically low levels. If they choose to wait, they will lose the chance to lock in pricing based on the federal government's production tax credits, which are set to expire at the end of this year.

Given the disarray of Washington's political climate, the credits almost certainly will not be renewed at the current levels, if at all. **If you support wind energy and all of its potential benefits for our state as I do, I urge you to contact your local utilities** and your NPPD board representatives and ask them to step up and help lead Nebraska into a future of home-grown wind energy production.

Oh, and by the way, your hair looks great with that "wind-blown" look, and if you wait a few days, the wind probably will blow those leaves back into your neighbor's yard.

Mike Zakrzewski is a farmer/rancher from O'Neill.

GERONIMO ENERGY

Geronimo Energy is a full-service renewable energy company headquartered in Minneapolis, Minnesota. Geronimo has developed over 1,600 megawatts of wind and solar projects that are either operational or currently under construction throughout the United States. Geronimo has a multi-gigawatt development pipeline of wind and solar projects in various stages of development throughout the United States. Geronimo provides custom solutions for utilities and corporations looking to harness renewable energy for business growth. With deep roots in agriculture, Geronimo prides itself on developing wind farms that are farmer-friendly, community-driven, and beneficial for rural communities.