

Wind energy discussion should be based on facts

It's heartening to see a lively discussion about wind energy unfolding in the Vermont media. But if we are to have this discussion, it should be based on facts rather than myths that are being perpetuated. I offer these facts.

Wind energy is cost competitive and provides long-term price stability.

Vermont is likely to face higher electricity prices in the future especially as our contracts with Hydro Quebec and Vermont Yankee expire in the next decade. Wind energy can provide us with some level of price stability. Because its fuel (the wind) is free, wind energy is not subject to price fluctuations. Once installed, the price of wind energy is predictable and stable for at least the next 20 years. In many regions of the country wind energy is increasingly cost competitive with natural gas-fired power plants, the largest source of new electricity generating capacity.

Wind energy benefits are local.

Vermont sends over \$1 billion per year out of state to purchase energy. In-state wind energy projects will keep our energy dollars in Vermont and support local communities. Wind farms add to our local and state tax bases and provide a steady income through lease payments to landowners. It's estimated that developing just six wind farms in Vermont would pay an estimated \$2.7 million to landowners, \$2.2 million in property taxes and \$0.7 million in state taxes each year.

Wind turbines are reliable.

Those who oppose wind projects cite reliability as a major weakness. In actuality, wind turbines are extremely reliable and are available to run 98 to 99% of the time—as good as just about any other generating source. Reliability shouldn't be confused with intermittency. The wind doesn't blow all the time, but our region's electric grid is equipped to deal with such variability. Power plants are throttled up and down every day based on how much electricity is being used, what plants are in service, and the price of input fuel. Wind developers carry out extensive wind resource assessments of potential sites and simply wouldn't invest in project locations that don't have adequate wind capacity.

Wind energy receives only modest government subsidies.

Commercial wind farms receive a federal tax credit of 1.8 cents per kilowatt-hour of electricity produced. The total value of this credit pales in comparison to the tax credits enjoyed by traditional energy sources. All renewable energy sources and conservation combined receive less than 10% of the more than \$10 billion in federal energy tax breaks available over the next five years. On a level playing field with no subsidies wind could compete well with other energy sources, even without taking into account the economic value of reduced pollution.

Wind turbines can be a part of Vermont's working landscape.

Recent polls show a majority of Vermonters favor greater use of renewable energy in our state. Placement of wind turbines on Vermont's ridges has also received strong support.

Wind turbines proposed in Vermont require less than one acre of clearing each. Only logging roads are usually required for construction and access. Moreover, a recent national study found no evidence that wind projects have a negative impact on property values.

Wind power, the world's fastest growing electricity source, is proven. It's cost effective. It keeps our energy dollars local. It diversifies our energy mix. It's clean. If Vermont, known for its environmental ethic, is not willing to do its part, who else should we depend on? My guess is the majority of Vermonters will make the responsible choice when it comes to wind energy development.

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