

Wind Farm Back to the Drawing Board

BY BRYAN BULLOCK • News Journal • November 25, 2010

SHELBY -- A project years in the making to plant wind turbines in north central Ohio farmland has gone back to the drawing board.

Owners of the Black Fork Wind project say they are working to retool plans to build a wind farm in Richland and Crawford counties, a project initially estimated to cost more than \$440 million.

A state [application](#) to move the project forward was withdrawn in August after Element [Power](#), an Oregon-based alternative energy firm, acquired the development assets of the company behind the wind farm, Colorado-based Gary Energetics.

Scott Hawken, senior project manager for Element Power, said his company plans to submit a new application to the Ohio Power Sitting Board before the year is over, paving the way for construction to begin in 2012.

"We started working with what had already been done from a design and layout perspective," he said. "With our experience, we thought we could [improve](#) the plan."

Hawken said the new plan will encompass similar project boundaries, about 30,000 acres of mostly agricultural property north of Crestline and west of Shelby. About 20,000 acres of land are currently under contract. [Leasing](#) of private land for the project began in November 2007 and is ongoing.

Hawken said the size, location and quantity of wind turbines in the Black Fork Wind project have yet to be determined. He estimated there will be 90 to 100 turbines built, which is less than the 112 initially slated for the first phase of development.

Backers of the project say the wind farm will create [clean energy](#), jobs and tax dollars for state and local governments.

The developer behind a similar project in Morrow County estimates its 130-turbine wind farm will generate \$1.4 million in local [taxes](#) annually after it is constructed in 2014.

Nazre Adum, [business development](#) director for Chicago-based Invenergy, said his company has acquired [lease](#) options on roughly 6,500 acres of property, a third of what is needed to move the project forward.

"We're still reaching out to land owners to sign more land," Adum said. "We haven't been that [successful](#) over the last few months (in signing additional property)."

Once the company has enough acreage optioned, it will determine the actual land it will lease for turbines and power lines -- most of which will run underground.

The company pays property owners for lease options. Adum said property owners selected to have a turbine built on their land will receive "a significant amount" of compensation on an annual basis. He said he could not be more specific about the contracts, which are all based on the same template.

The company plans to submit an application to the state power board for project approval in late 2012.

Some north central Ohio officials have questioned if wind farm projects will benefit the broader community.

Richland County Commissioner Ed Olson said he supports alternative energy, but is skeptical if the Black Fork wind farm will benefit the county.

He said county engineers met with their peers in Benton County, Ind., to discuss the outcome of a wind farm built there by another developer. Heavy equipment used to build the turbines reportedly did \$13 million worth of damage to rural roads, repairs that county had to pay for.

"I don't think we (Richland County) would recover from those kind of damages," Olson said. "We are struggling to keep up with annual road maintenance as it is."

Richland and Crawford county officials have submitted a letter to the state power board expressing these concerns.

Crawford County Commissioner Doug Weisenauer said he hopes an agreement about road repairs can be reached with the new developer behind the wind farm.

"It's one issue we have not resolved," Weisenauro said. "We want to get an agreement hammered out."

Local officials, however, may have little control over what shape wind farm projects take. The state power board and the Ohio Department of Development have the main authority to approve alternate energy projects. The power board reviews proposed locations and issues permits. Development officials determine whether a project qualifies for a personal and real property tax exemption as a renewable resource or alternate energy provider.

North central Ohio residents and officials will have the opportunity to raise concerns about wind farm projects during the state approval process, which takes about a year and includes two public notices and hearings.

The power board has approved plans for six wind facilities across the state totaling 555 turbines and up to 1,032.3 megawatts of power. Under Ohio's alternative energy portfolio standard, by 2025, 25 percent of electricity sold in Ohio must be generated from alternative energy sources. At least half of this energy must come from [renewable energy](#) sources, including wind, and at least half of the renewable energy must be generated by facilities within Ohio.

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