

INDEPENDENT THINKING

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Letters to the Editor

VIEWPOINT ■ By David Roberson

Questioning the faith of wind power

If you're against the Hoosac Wind project and similar wind farms, it doesn't mean you're an elitist who cares about appearance at the expense of saving the planet. Residents of this area deserve a discussion based on facts, starting with this: wind's potential for reducing greenhouse gas emissions is almost incalculably small

DEVELOPMENT OF wind power plants is swiftly becoming the most critical rural conservation and land-use issue of our time. But many who support wind power are sadly unaware of the technology's serious impacts and have accepted on faith the seductive vision offered by the industry: that wind power is clean, green energy.

We are led to believe that construction of wind plants is progressive and ecologically responsible development that will lessen our reliance on foreign oil and reduce global warming. Opponents are often dismissed as elitists who care more for the appearance of the landscape than for saving the planet. For some folks, it seems, if you aren't into wind power then you are an "anti-environmentalist." That is untrue, and I find it disturbing that this attitude seems so prevalent.

I don't like to represent myself as an exemplar of any green ideal, but I feel a deep personal connection to nature. My wife and I garden organically, raise much of our own meat and dairy, and try to live simply and sustainably. We heat our home almost exclusively with wood that I cut on our land.

When we left our rented home in Hawley, where we lived for 12 years without AC electricity, and moved to Rowe, one of my first thoughts was to put up a wind generator (yes, its true), get some batteries and an inverter, and continue to live independent of the power company.

After I pondered and researched the matter, I came to feel that erecting a wind generator to power my grid-connected house would amount to a noisy, expensive eyesore that would represent nothing more than a symbolic commitment to an ideal.

Now, I feel the same way about large-scale wind.

WE ARE ASKED — expected, really — to take it on faith that the environmental benefit of wind energy is worth the cost. The problem is, wind power won't deliver what is promised.

Electricity is produced from a variety of sources in this country, but petroleum simply isn't a significant supplier to our electrical mix, accounting for less than

2½ percent of U.S. generation — and even this small fraction is unlikely to be impacted by wind-plant development.

Beyond this, those who think that we face a choice between turbines and smokestacks or nuclear plants are kidding themselves. The erratic nature of the wind means that turbines simply cannot supply the base load that other forms of generation do. Those other generators will continue to be needed to back up the wildly variable output of wind turbines, with the probability that in so doing these plants will actually emit more pollution for each kilowatt-hour they generate than if they were allowed to operate normally.

What is worse, giant wind plants produce very little electricity. The Hoosac Wind project proposed for the towns of Monroe and Florida, with 20 turbines — each 340 feet high — spread out over 1,500 acres and miles of ridge on two mountains, might optimistically produce 14/100 of 1 percent of the electricity used in Massachusetts annually. A hundred and twenty such turbines spiking our ridges would likely produce less than one percent of the electricity used in the state, while that electrical use is going up by around 2 percent — more than twice as much — every year. Even if we were to construct new wind towers as fast as we possibly could — in the process transforming western Massachusetts into a science-fiction landscape bristling with enormous black-bladed turbines, lit day and night with flashing strobes — we wouldn't

Wind-plant proponents know that having secured the hearts of much of the public in this way, reasoned opposition to their plans to industrialize vast swaths of rural America can be marginalized — and they are spending enormous amounts of money to do just that.

even begin to keep up.

The wind industry assures us that wind power will help prevent global warming by reducing carbon dioxide produced by other forms of electric generation. Enxco, the company backing Hoosac Wind, has offered improbably optimistic projections of how much carbon dioxide

emission might be avoided by the operation of the plant.

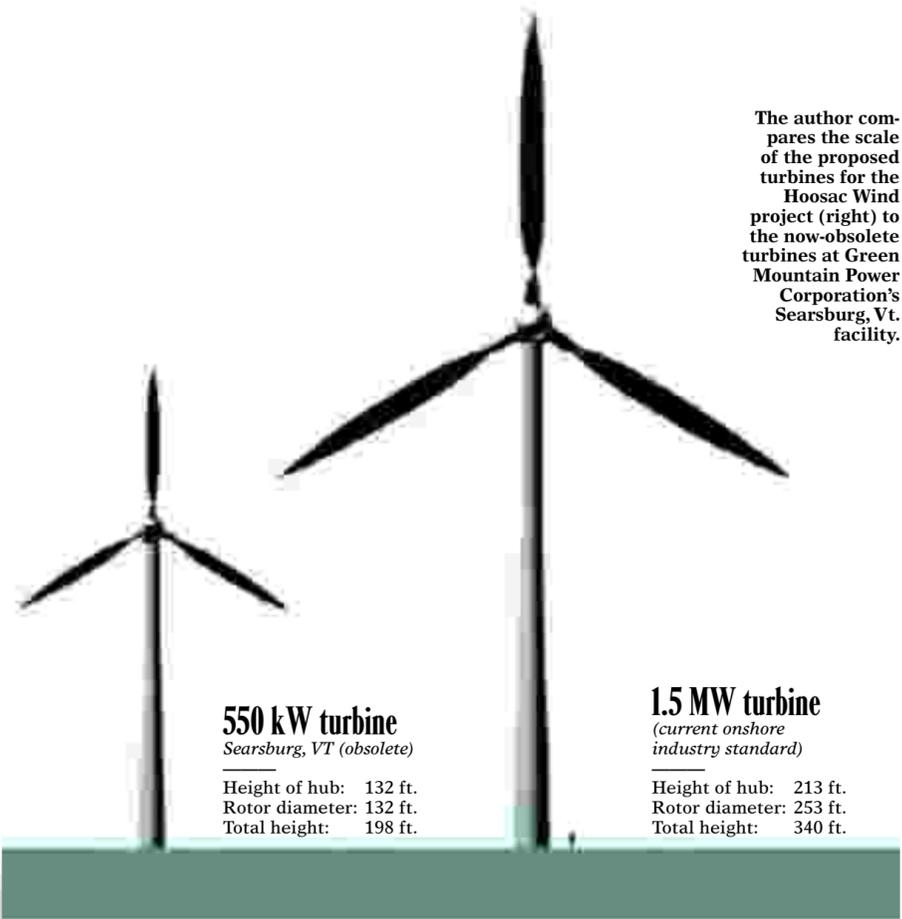
But even if we take their figures at face value, they amount to a mere 23/100ths of 1 percent of that fraction of carbon dioxide that results from electricity generation in Massachusetts, or about 8/10,000 of 1 percent of U.S. anthropogenic (human-caused) greenhouse gas emissions. In this country, greenhouse gas emissions resulting from electrical generation are outweighed by other man-made sources 2-to-1, while anthropogenic emissions as a whole account for about 3 percent of the world total; the remaining 97 percent comes from natural sources such as oceans and bogs.

In a nutshell: Hoosac Wind's potential contribution to reducing greenhouse gas emissions, when taken in a broader context, is almost incalculably small.

UNFORTUNATELY, FOR SOME people the inconvenient truths about wind energy will be too uncomfortable to contemplate.

"It's the vision, not the view," they'll say, insisting that the turbines have a symbolic value that trumps their negative impacts on wildlife, on rural economies, and on the quality-of-life of residents forced to live with them. Wind-plant proponents know that having secured the hearts of much of the public in this way, reasoned opposition to their plans to industrialize vast swaths of rural America can be marginalized — and they are spending enormous amounts of money to do just that.

The real reason that multinational entities are intent on constructing wind towers is the generous tax credits and depreciation allowances that are provided for these developments. Huge corporations like Enxco parent EDF — the French energy conglomerate that is the largest operator of nuclear reactors in the world, as well as Europe's leading trader of coal, gas and oil — thus form unlikely alliances with organizations that have historically championed preservation. The beauty and ecological integrity of our few remaining wild places is thus sacrificed to a green idealism.



550 kW turbine
Searsburg, VT (obsolete)

Height of hub: 132 ft.
Rotor diameter: 132 ft.
Total height: 198 ft.

1.5 MW turbine
(current onshore industry standard)

Height of hub: 213 ft.
Rotor diameter: 253 ft.
Total height: 340 ft.

The author compares the scale of the proposed turbines for the Hoosac Wind project (right) to the now-obsolete turbines at Green Mountain Power Corporation's Searsburg, Vt. facility.



Five of the 11 turbines in Searsburg, Vt.

www.endlessenergy.com

To see the future of the wind debate in America, it's instructive to look overseas. In the United Kingdom, central government policies promoting wind development have sparked a wave of outrage and opposition in rural areas targeted for massive wind plants.

Prime Minister Tony Blair has lent his support to opponents of one wind power proposal among his home constituency, while his government has issued policy that hobbles the ability of other communities to reject wind plants. His attitude mirrors our own Governor Mitt Romney's hypocritical opposition to wind power, which apparently applies only to Nantucket Sound. Meanwhile, the director appointed by the governor to the state's highest environmental authority has stated that her decision *not* to require an Environmental Impact Report for Hoosac Wind "will set the tone for further development of wind power" in inland Massachusetts.

It appears the scenario in Britain is poised to repeat itself here as well. In Germany, wind plants are widely lamented for the brutal destruction they have inflicted where they have come to dominate the landscape. While Denmark exports the vast majority of their wind-generated electricity to neighboring countries at a deep discount, it is then forced to re-import expensive nuclear power. This has led to that country having the highest electric rates in Europe, and yet Danish carbon dioxide emissions continue to rise.

Rural communities — from the Gaspé Peninsula in Québec straight down the Appalachian range to the Allegheny Front — are destined for thousands of turbines if current plans materialize, and Franklin County is in the center of the crosshairs, with the construction of the largest wind plant in New England possibly beginning here next year. While developers offer glib assurances that their projects are beneficial, those questioning these facilities believe that the issues surrounding renewable energy deserve critical and substantive debate, not sloganeering.

David Roberson lives in Rowe with his wife, dogs, cats, goats, geese, and chickens.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR



Think about, learn from statue

To the editor of the Independent:

Portraying Indian women as Barbie-doll-like figures is disrespectful of all indigenous cultures and of women in general. The letter by Rhonda Anderson ["Stereotypes and bad taste prevail in new statue on Mohawk Trail," *Independent*, Nov. 25-Dec. 8] is a clear explanation of why all the Native American figures on the new water fountain statue in front of the Arrowwood Shops are offensive.

Please read her intelligent

We welcome your letters, but when space is at a premium, we will give priority to contributions that have not appeared elsewhere.

letter, look at the water fountain, think about what you see, and learn from it. Mistakes can often be balanced by acquiring new knowledge and acting from there.

KATHLEEN O'ROURKE
Shelburne Falls, Dec. 7

A fine piece

To the editor of the Independent:

Yowsa! I just loved the Nicaragua article by Mick Comstock ["Two worlds apart, two worlds together," *Independent*, Dec. 9-22]. Your layout is absolutely gorgeous — one of the finest pieces I've seen in your paper so far. Really, really great job.

NATHALIE MCCORMICK
Shelburne Falls, Dec. 10

Shelburne Falls INDEPENDENT

8 Deerfield Ave., Shelburne Falls, MA 01370
(413) 625-8297 • fax (413) 826-9234

www.sfindependent.net • e-mail: news@sfindependent.net

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Jeff Potter, Editor and Co-Publisher (jeff@sfindependent.net)
Virginia Ray, Managing Editor (ginny@sfindependent.net)
Djuna Z. Schaub, Director of Marketing (djuna@sfindependent.net)
Kay Cafasso, Advertising Sales Representative (kay@sfindependent.net)
Emily Schwarzer, Editorial Assistant (emily@sfindependent.net)

Laurie Wheeler Burrington, Faye Whitney-Lussier,
Kate Higginbotham, Abe Loomis, Brad Peters,
Robert Potter, Jan Ross, Don Stewart, Contributing Editors

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A special additional page of holiday opinions appears on page 6.