

Wind industry a waste of money and poor job creator

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Climate change, dwindling resources, ecological and geopolitical concerns surrounding conventional sources of electricity — all are prominent worries today, as they should be.

Wind power companies and their lobbyists — and many in the environmentalist community — assure us that industrial wind can break our dependence on other fuels, reduce our emissions of greenhouse gases and other pollutants, and help build a “green” economy of 21st century jobs.

A closer look, however, reveals that wind’s actual record has not lived up to those promises — despite billions of dollars of public and private investment and an increasingly undeniable toll on the environment and on the citizens, mostly rural, who must bear the personal costs of 500-foot turbines thrust into their neighborhoods.

The wind is intermittent and variable, and when the realities of the electrical grid are taken into account, wind energy’s theoretical benefit is drastically reduced because other sources have to stay on line — and operate less efficiently — to not only provide electricity on demand, but also balance the fluctuating wind-generated supply.

Generous handouts — paid for by every American — intended to create a smattering of factory jobs (as promised, for example, in Georgia) could be much more efficiently spent to help the economy as a whole and to work towards seriously addressing concerns of resource depletion, energy security, and pollution control.

Not only are industrial wind turbines a waste of money, they also have serious negative impacts.

Wind projects usually target open land or undeveloped mountain ridges. A single turbine weighs 250 tons or more and requires wide heavy-duty roads for construction and maintenance. It is supported by an underground foundation of hundreds of tons of steel-reinforced concrete. A group of turbines is a sprawling facility that dominates the landscape for miles. In addition, the facility needs a substation and high-voltage transmission lines to connect to the grid.

Along with wind energy’s impact on rural landscapes and wild habitats, human neighbors often suffer from the noises generated by the giant machines. Leases typically include “gag orders” to keep landowners quiet about their complaints. Neighbors — many of them unsuspecting — are induced to silence in return for small “forbearance” payments.

As more people speak out, many jurisdictions are insisting that at least 2 kilometers (1.25 miles) separate the turbines from any residence to protect people’s health. Others are recognizing the necessity of limiting low-frequency and pulsating noise.

The wind industry has benefited for decades from favorable treatment by all levels of government. Yet to this day it has been unable to demonstrate the results that are still promised. Against this backdrop of a failed experiment, the clear burdens imposed by industrial wind — on our diminished landscape, on wildlife, on people’s right to enjoy their homes — are unacceptable.

It is time to hold this industry to account. Strict environmental siting and nuisance regulations are needed to limit its impacts. We need to end the many direct and indirect subsidies that prop it up.

Industrial wind has shown itself to be a great waster of resources, both natural and human. As more communities around the world learn about the harm it does and stand up to say no, our business and political leaders would do well to take heed.

The people speaking up are your neighbors, and they’re getting louder.

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