

Wind Projects To Benefit Environment and Economy

REPORT ON SOUTHEAST ALBERTA 2010 – Celebrating Our Community ALEX MCCUAIG
amccuaig@medicinehatnews.com

Once recognized as the national leader in the development of wind power in the country, Alberta has since fallen behind Ontario and Quebec in advancing the alternative energy source.

However, the first two of what promises to be many wind farms in southeastern Alberta may cut into the eastern provinces' lead.

Wild Rose 1 and 2 wind power projects have been simmering on the backburner for the last six years, being transferred through business acquisitions and jumping through regulatory hoops as the pieces of the puzzle have been put together.

But if things go as planned in the next two years, the landscape outside of Medicine Hat will likely see transformation from open prairie to forest of turbines.

Wild Rose 1 and 2 will be located approximately 25 kilometers south of Irvine and Dunmore respectively and include more than 250 turbines producing nearly 380 megawatts of electricity.

In an interview with the News during an open house for Wild Rose 2 at the Cypress county administrative building, Greg Copeland from NaturEner said the company is forging ahead with its project.

'It's a lengthy process; we are looking at construction starting in 2011 and then completion sometime late in summer or fall 2012,' said Copeland, NaturEner's director of wind energy development. 'Our next big hurdle is to get the application submitted to the (Alberta Utilities Commission).'

Getting to that point has had its challenges. Wildlife, noise, sightlines, residential homes, and oil and gas developments all have to have a sufficient buffer zone before placement of the turbines in wind efficient areas are even considered. Add to that the needed agreement from the landowners and the county municipality and the task becomes Herculean.

And even with those concerns taken care of one major issue still remains – transmission lines.

The East Palliser Transmission line, which will see significant upgrades to the electrical infrastructure of southern Alberta, still needs approval.

'You have to have the ability to plug in the wind power,' stated Copeland, 'and the East Palliser line is how that power is going to be injected.'

Cypress County municipal planner Jeffrey Dowling said the project has benefits to the municipality and the province.

'Alberta needs energy and these projects provide an alternative energy source that is environmentally friendly,' he said.

Some opposition was expressed during initial talks regarding Wild Rose 1 which has seen the area re-zoned to allow for the turbines.

But, said Dowling, 'NaturEner has addressed most of those concerns and as a result the public is at least comfortable with the project.'

Land owner Ben Fus said as long as the proper controls are in place and the turbines are a safe distance from homes, he's OK with the project near his property.

Fus said he and others have had discussions with NaturEner about the project, with each side communicating their concerns and plans.

'If NaturEner listens to farmers, then it's okay, but we have to work together on this and it has to be a co-op between them and landowners.'

According to NaturEner, economic spin-offs include the creation of 200 temporary jobs and 15 permanent ones, as well as \$400 million spent in construction – of which 20 per cent would be flowing to regional businesses.

An estimated \$1 million taxes would be generated for the county with another million going to landowners in royalties.

The projects also have the potential to provide power to 50,000 homes annually.