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Wind expensive versus fuel

By **Reggie Ponder** Print E-Mail
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Saturday, June 4, 2011
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Wind farms will not reduce electric costs in the short run, a North Carolina municipal power executive said Friday.

While not denying the potential benefits of wind-generated electricity in terms of providing some kind of alternative to plants running solely on fossil fuels, Ken Raber pointed out that current costs for wind generation are at least twice that of prices for conventional forms of generation such as coal fired plants and nuclear plants.

Raber, senior vice president for ElectriCities Services with the N.C. Eastern Municipal Power Agency, said current rates for electricity generated by onshore wind-powered plants are running 9-12 cents per kilowatt and offshore plants prices are currently 20-21 cents per kw. These rates are net prices after government subsidies are factored in, he said.

By contrast, power generated by conventional plants is running about 4.5 cents per kw, Raber said.

The N.C. Eastern Municipal Power Agency is the wholesale supplier of electricity for Elizabeth City, Hertford, Edenton and 29 other municipalities in eastern North Carolina.

The NCEMPA's wholesale rates are as much as one-third higher than other wholesale rates in areas served by the municipalities — and have risen 18 percent since the summer of 2008 — prompting some residents of the Elizabeth City area to comment at public meetings this spring that they hope the installation of a wind farm in Pasquotank and Perquimans counties will help reduce the high electric costs paid by Elizabeth City and its retail customers.

But even though the Desert Wind Energy Project planned by Atlantic Wind, a subsidiary of global wind giant Iberdrola Renewables, will create some 19 high-paying permanent jobs and hundreds of construction jobs as it is being built — and could very well spur other economic growth — the benefits for now will not include lower prices for electricity.

"It's going to be more expensive," Raber said. "I don't think there's any question about that. The question with wind is going to be 'when will the wind blow?' and 'will it blow when you need it?'"

Wind generation can't be relied on for meeting peak demand, Raber said.

Most wind turbines are backed up with gas generation, he said, since there has to be some kind of alternative system to keep the plant going in the absence of sufficient wind. But the wind turbines provide a benefit in that no fossil fuel is being burned when the wind is blowing, he said.

Raber said he realizes many people expect wind-generated electricity to be less expensive than other forms of power.

"I think the idea is that the wind is free, so getting the energy from

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the wind farm is going to be cheaper than buying it from Progress Energy — when exactly the opposite is true,” Raber said.

John Droz Jr., a physicist and advocate of geothermal energy as well as a leading wind energy skeptic, said that if fossil fuels eventually become expensive enough, or wind energy becomes cost-effective enough, that wind is an economically practical alternative, then he would be willing to take a new look at wind.

“Show me the proof” that wind generation can be cost-effective, Droz said. “Come back when it makes sense. Don’t do it now when it doesn’t make sense.”

But Mehran Elahi, a professor at Elizabeth City State University who has conducted wind energy research in collaboration with Texas Tech University, said that even though wind and other renewables are more costly right now, he doesn’t know of anyone who predicts that fossil fuel prices will do anything but rise over the long term.

For that reason, the government subsidies that make wind generation feasible in the present are a sensible investment in the nation’s energy future, according to Elahi.

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WIND ENERGY FACTS

Submitted by [EnergyExpert](#) on June 6, 2011 - 2:20pm.

The cost of wind energy is indisputably much higher than ANY conventional source of electricity (including external costs) — and there is no scientific evidence that this will change in the foreseeable future. That’s why wind energy was abandoned a hundred years ago. It is only being resurrected now due to efforts by lobbyists to get wind energy extraordinary special subsidies and perks. These are designed to line the pockets of multi-national corporations at the expense of NC taxpayers and utility ratepayers.

To say that “fossil fuel prices will go up” is:

- 1 - highly speculative (historically they have been cyclical, not just up),
- 2 - pretends that wind costs won’t go up (they have so far),
- 3 - ignores the fact that wind energy requires an augmenting source (typically gas: a fossil fuel), and
- 4 - irrelevant as fossil fuels are not our only alternatives (e.g. geothermal, nuclear).

But the cost of wind energy electricity is just the tip of the iceberg.

For instance, independent scientific studies have shown that the two counties around Elizabeth City could possibly lose as much as \$24 million dollars A YEAR due to agricultural losses related to bats killed by turbines. That’s just one example of numerous environmental impacts these turbines will have.

Who is presenting a balanced scientific picture to the citizens of NC???

See "EnergyPresentation.Info" for more understanding of this technical matter.

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