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What to do with all that wind?

Dennis Byrne



Dennis Byrne
6:33 p.m. CDT, June 29, 2010
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A quiz about wind power:

- Who runs America's biggest wind farm? (A) Cannon Power Group, (B) **General Electric**, (C) **BP** or (D) Terra-Gen Power.
- Where is it located? (A) **Oregon**, (B) **Colorado**, (C) **California** or (D) Indiana.

The answers are BP and Indiana. BP? The company whose thirst for oil may have polluted the Gulf of Mexico for decades? And Indiana? I just assumed the best place to harvest the wind was on gusty, barren height out West. Not so; they're creeping up on Chicago.

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Ride south from Chicago for a couple of hours on Interstate Highway 65 through the flatlands of Indiana and you'll see the future as envisioned by advocates of wind power: hundreds of wind turbines, as far as the eye can see. They rise some 260 feet to the turbine's hub and, when the rotor is fully extended straight up, they hit almost 400 feet — at least the height of a 35-story building.

Twenty-four hours a day, seven days a week, they are whirling away, scarring what previously had been an awesome sight in itself: absolutely flat Indiana cornfields running uninterrupted to the horizon. Of course, it's relative. To some, it's a boring sight. But for

me, the idea that in a universe of curved lines nature could have produced something so flat and uniform is a powerful reminder of Mother Earth's exceptionalism.

What we have here are miles and miles of visual pollution. Those who imagined that a wind farm would consist of a half dozen or so wind turbines scattered about in the boonies should take the drive. By some estimates, the hundreds of wind turbines in the I-65/Benton County corridor produce enough energy to power a city of 250,000. Imagine what it would have to look like to power a city of 3 million, like Chicago, or its metropolitan area of 7 million.

Indiana plans to rush even more wind turbines on line, making it one of the fastest-growing wind generation states in the nation. Among the Indiana providers is Orion Energy LLC, a wholly owned subsidiary of BP Alternative Energy, which proclaims its Benton County facility to be the nation's largest. Its Fowler Ridge Wind Farm, when completed, could become the world's largest. Businesses and many farmers welcome the developments for the cash they bring.

But one part of the story doesn't get much attention: the dissension that the gigantic wind farms sparks within the environmental community. Wind turbines are considered by many environmentalists to be a safe, environmentally friendly source of power that will help control global warming. But not always.

Environmentalists last week sued to halt a 130-turbine wind farm off Cape Cod arguing it could endanger protected migratory birds and whales. The late Sen. Edward Kennedy, D-Mass., as green as they come, had for years fought the farm.

Sharen Trembath, an environmentalist writing in the Buffalo Evening News in Buffalo, N.Y., was testy about plans to install 40 to 120 turbine "behemoths" in Lake Erie. She describes an assortment of safety and environmental

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horrors: ice floes crashing into the turbines, fishermen dragging their anchors across the electric cable, nighttime navigational dangers, exploding turbines, drinking water risks, electromagnetic fields leading to [multiple sclerosis](#) and cancer. "Wind energy is not green," she said. "It is unpredictable and variable. In 10 years, when the incentives and tax subsidies end and the developer moves on, what will we be left with?"

Similar questions are asked about an Evanston proposal to put enough wind turbines in Lake Michigan to generate power for the city's 30,000 homes. Undoubtedly, residents of Chicago and its North Shore suburbs will be concerned not just about environmental questions but also about how lines of waving rotors off shore will affect their property values.

DeKalb County residents have sued to have 126 existing turbines torn down because of complaints about sleep disturbances, illnesses and vertigo from the rotors' strobelike flashes.

Environmentalists who considered wind to be an unending source of safe power now are finding that it raises the same kind of environmental questions that they had used to stymie traditional utility and public works projects. In this, there's poetic justice.

Dennis Byrne is a Chicago-area writer and consultant. He blogs at [ChicagoNow.com](#).

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So Mr. Byrne believes that corn to the end of sight isn't visual pollution, but it nature just being itself? Maybe all sources of energy - strip mines, oil fields, drilling platforms - should be farther than he can drive.

The hidden story about dissension - environmentalists and landowners fighting about the Cape Cod plan has been in the Tribune and other papers everywhere for years. That Sharen Trembath objects to structures being built in "her lake" which she's been helping to clean up is another example of not wanting to be near the source of power. Would she prefer living on the Gulf Coast right now?

Bridges, North Sea oil rigs and other structures are built to handle ice floes. Bury the cables, or let fishermen know they can't anchor around turbines. Put lights on the "behemoths" so boaters won't blunder into them - like we do with everything else people might blunder into..

Drinking water risks from wind turbines? I'll have to read her article.

Anyway, if it is important for the Midwest, with its wind resources, to avoid job creation, and to depend on energy from elsewhere, then I'm with you, Mr. Byrne. But while we're at it, we have to get rid of the corn. You see, ADM turns some of it into ethanol, and who wants to look at mile after mile of energy?

bfagan (06/30/2010, 12:45 AM)

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Poetic Justice? What are you writing about? Your black and white Liberal versus Conservative universe fails you.

The Environment merits protections. I hate to have to state the obvious. Wind farms are obtrusive. BP



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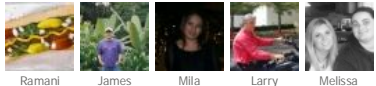
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is abusive. Other alternatives exist to either and should appropriately be the focus of publicly funded development.

Why should the major oil companies get all the public funding?

Ed_McGuinness (06/29/2010, 11:56 PM)

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dnbf (06/29/2010, 10:44 PM)

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