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Despite their reputation as a clean source of energy, wind farms face opposition



Steve DeWitt/Specialists/Chris Wood

Cows graze near wind turbines from the Katabula Wind Farm near Valley City. The wind turbines have supporters, who say the turbines bring economic benefits to North Dakota; and detractors, who say the turbines are ugly and noise-pollution.

GUST OF CONCERNS

Many people in North Dakota are shocked that wind turbines are dotting the state. It is an alternate source of energy, and financially, it is good for the state's economy. But there are two sides to every story, and state legislators heard both sides on Wednesday in Valley City.

The Energy Development and Transmission Committee first listened to NextEra Energy Resources representatives on wind facility construction and operation.



Kevin
Cranor

Scott Scovill and Tom Factor of the Florida-based company explained in detail what their company does before, during and after construction and operation of wind turbine farms. NextEra, with Otter Tail Power Co., owns the Ashtrails Wind Farm northeast of Valley City.

"We've never had a complaint yet," said Scovill, adding that the company has heard one gripe recently.

Public Service Commissioner Kevin Cranor presented on the PSC's recent activities and studies relating to wind energy.

"We've been accused of going too fast and of going too slow" on dealing with wind turbine projects in the state, Cranor said.

The energy development committee is made up of 12

North Dakota legislators, including Rep. Lee Kallok, D-Meyville, whose district includes parts of Barnes County.

Rep. Phil Mueller, D-Valley City, also attended the meeting and said wind farms are good for the landowner and companies that own them.



Left: Mary Ann, left, and Jim Miller speak Wednesday at the American in Valley City about their concerns over wind turbines near their rural Laverne farm. The Millers say Florida-based NextEra Energy Resources, which operates the Ashtrails Wind Farm northeast of Valley City, did not seek their input before putting up turbines. **Right:** Tom Factor of NextEra speaks at the Wednesday hearing held by the State Legislature's Energy Development and Transmission Committee.



Photos by Jean Schlegel / Times-Record

"We want wind energy in North Dakota," Mueller said. "Sunshine and wind go together."

Mueller said potentially negative affects of wind farms need to be out there before a landowner signs for a wind project to be put on his or her land.

Sen. Richard Warden, R-Dickinson, heads the energy development committee. "We want to make sure we take care of the landowners," he said.

"We are here to gather information. We want to gather all our resources - wind as well as any of the rest," Warden said.

No input?

Local residents Jim and Mary Ann Miller and Dennis and Cathryn Stilling gave testimony on how wind facilities have affected their lives. Their presentations were not the rosy pictures the NextEra representatives

presented about wind turbines.

The residents said they were kept in the dark about wind turbines being constructed near their properties, and the wind turbines have turned their lives upside down.

"We didn't have any input at all," Dennis Stilling said.

A nearby shaking (Jim Miller said "We objected to it all. It was all done in secret.")

Dennis and Cathryn Stilling live 12 miles north of the Peak on an Barnes County Highway 27, also known as the Peak Road, near where the first wind turbines in the Ashtrails Wind Farm project went up in spring 2008.

The Millers' home and business is four miles north and two miles west of Laverne. Near their home is Phase 2 of the wind turbine project, which began in early August 2009.

TURSDAY, Page 2



Photo by Joan Santiago / Times Record

The Energy Development and Transmission Committee meets Wednesday at the Armory in Valley City to hear support and opposition to wind turbines.

TURBINES: Legislators tour some wind farm facilities after meeting

FROM 1

There is talk of a Phase 3 for wind turbines south of Interstate 94 near Cuba and Pingol, but there are just rumors at this time, Killings said.

Jim Miller said wind farm companies plan to bring 7,000 wind turbines to the state.

'Zero consideration'

Jim and his wife, Mary Ann, moved to an abandoned farm near Lavonia in 2004, when they have a log house on their 22 acres. They operate a business called Prairie Inn, where they and their employees build and sell dog beds. They also have sled dogs.



Cathryn Killings, from left, Dennis Killings and NextEra Energy Resources Project Manager Scott Sizemil speak at Wednesday's hearing. Below: Rep. Lee Kistler, St. Maryville, center, is on the energy development committee.

During construction of the wind turbines, their power was shut off for hours without warning, which halted their work.

"We had zero consideration," Jim said. "Zero."

After the Millers voiced their concerns to NextEra Project Manager Scott Scovill, they were given a generator, which didn't have enough power to accommodate the power needed for their machinery.

Mary Ann said Scovill later brought them a larger generator, which they now use if their power is cut off again.

The Millers bought their property from their neighbors and became good friends. Now, they said, their neighbor is threatening to take them to court due to their opposition to the wind turbines.

Jim said the turbines are now in place, and he thinks the turbine company has a 99-year lease, so he believes "they are here to stay."

Jim said the noise from the nearby turbines wakes him up in the middle of the night. He said the noise is like three semi-trucks running 24/7 right outside their house.

"We've been discredited, our neighbors are against us and this has shut down our business for

"It's dramatic, I guarantee you. We have this noise 24/7 and it has become a health issue."

**- Dennis Stillings
Rural Valley City**

six to eight weeks," Jim said. "It has left me and my wife distressed and angry."

Mary Ann, who was near tears as she talked to the legislators, said "We were never contacted. They trespassed on our community. This is wrong, with no consideration and no voice."

She asked the legislators to make rules concerning issues related to their plight.

The Millers earlier appeared before the Public Service Commission for help, but they have not received any satisfaction from that meeting.

There are still many unresolved issues, they said.

'Health issue'

Dennis Stillings said he and Cathryn moved to their new home in 2008 from Hawaii for "great silence," but now they are in the middle of wind turbines. They are mainly concerned about noise.

"It's like a huge cement mixer," Dennis said.

Cathryn said, "The turbines never rest and people need rest." She sometimes goes to their well-insulated chicken coop for rest, she said.

One turbine is one-third of a mile south of their home and another is one-third of a mile northwest.

There are also two turbines straight west of them one mile away.

The worst time for them was in mid-August to mid-September, when they couldn't get any sleep.

"It was the worst month we've

ever put in. It's dramatic, I guarantee you. We have this noise 24/7 and it has become a health issue," Dennis said.

Turbine tour

After the all-day meeting, the legislative committee toured some of the wind facilities, including turbines near the Stillings' home.

Wardner invited the Millers and Stillings to attend the next meeting in Bismarck to discuss the issues further. He said this is the reason they had the meeting in Valley City on Wednesday: to hear from both sides on the wind turbine issue.

