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PLACE *Constructing the Niagara Escarpment: A History*, Feature Blog

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WINDS OF CHANGE

ON THE WISCONSIN ESCARPMENT

The confrontation between sustainability, resource development, and resident well-being is shaping the wind wars of Wisconsin's energy future.

We Energies, a subsidiary of Wisconsin Energy Corporation, serving parts of Wisconsin and Michigan's Upper Peninsula, announced March 25 that it would develop Glacier Hills Wind Park, a renewable energy project "expected to generate more than 400 million emission-free kilowatt hours annually", enough to power 45,000 homes. This follows an earlier development in the Fond du Lac county where 88 turbines have been generating electricity at Blue Sky Green Field Wind Energy Center since May 19, 2008.

Nine commercial wind farms and over 300 turbines are currently in operation in Wisconsin, with an additional eighteen proposals on the table. The push to develop wind power in the state has accelerated since 2006 when its legislation mandated a renewable portfolio standard (RPS) requiring utilities to produce 10 percent of all their electricity from renewable energy sources by 2015.

Although it isn't the best state for harnessing wind energy, Michael Vickerman, Executive Director of Renew Wisconsin claims that "Fond du Lac County is the epicenter of wind power production in Wisconsin, no question about it." Geography and topography are clearly factors in determining site locations. With an average speed of 18 mph, the areas along the Great Lakes and on the Wisconsin Niagara Escarpment, particularly near the Fond du Lac region, have been identified as a superior wind generation path within area industry. As winds blow across the limestone ledge which rises about 300 feet higher than neighbouring lands, the escarpment forces them up, which increases their speed. In an article in Marketplace Magazine, Steve Prestegard writes that it is the "combination of geography, electric infrastructure and governmental and organizational emphasis [that is the reason] the area between Lake Winnebago and the lower Fox River and Lake Michigan is seeing explosive growth in wind power projects."

For some, wind development is attractive not only for its renewable energy potential, but as a source of personal revenue. Invenergy's proposed Ledge Wind Energy Project, the largest yet with 100 turbines scheduled for installation in Brown County, places turbines within towns and, for the right price, puts proceeds in farmers' hands. Compensating landowners up to \$10,000 annually for the right to operate a turbine on private property, the scheme has been praised by some who have seen it as part of the answer to reviving America's struggling rural communities.

The surge in wind energy production, however, has not been met with a favorable welcome by all. Brown County Citizens for Responsible Wind Energy, a group representing more than 200 area individuals, opposes the creation of more large-scale windfarms, citing negative physiological, economic, and environmental effects as consequences of irresponsible development. Though supportive of green and renewable energy, much of the group's resistance to the initiatives of We Energies or private outfits such as Invenergy lies in the siting of turbines and their setback from neighbouring properties. Close proximity to residences beyond an optimal safe distance, for instance, is alleged to cause sleep deprivation because of environmental factors such as noise.

Although the state's Public Service Commission is delaying the applications procedure in order to appraise evidence of the detrimental impacts of turbines and implement installation standards, the rubber-stamping of new proposals is predicted to continue in order to meet Wisconsin's RPS.

Links

[Brown County Citizens for Responsible Wind Energy](#)

[We Energies](#)

[RENEW Wisconsin](#)

[Invenergy](#)

[Life with DeKalb Turbines](#) – a family blog that reveals the reality of living in the shadows of the DeKalb, Illinois industrial wind turbines