

Environment North Position on the Horizon Wind Farm Development in the Nor'Wester Mountains

November 21, 2010

Environment North Board supports the establishment of a wind farm in the Nor'Westers because it will contribute to the region's green energy resources. The Board acknowledges that the project proposed by Horizon Inc. has been controversial and the current lawsuit has further complicated the dynamics.

Environment North met with the Nor'Wester Mountain Escarpment Protection Committee (NMEPC) and by conference call with Horizon, Inc. Environment North Board has also been conducting independent research into the relative merits of wind energy.

Members of the NMEPC have numerous interconnected concerns regarding this project. Three concerns were of importance for consideration by Environment North: whether the power is necessary, whether the process and planning was flawed and if the beauty, recreation, heritage, native flora and fauna will be irreparably damaged by this project.

Even with the reduced demand of recent years, hydroelectric capabilities do not supply all of the region's demands. Water levels are not always sufficient. In 2009, Thunder Bay Generating Station produced about 123 million KWh, in 2008 702 million KWh. Atikokan Generating Station produced 133 million KWh in 2009 and 313 million KWh in 2008. As a consequence they also produced tonnes of greenhouse gases and toxic emissions.

The future sources of the region's green energy supply are not entirely certain. Plans are to eliminate coal. Biofuels, natural gas, more hydroelectricity, and more solar and wind resources are likely. Wind energy would have the least overall impact on the environment when the entire energy cycle, from construction of turbines to decommissioning of the site, is considered. Improved east-west transmission is also a possibility.

In the future we anticipate an increased demand for energy in the city and the region because of an increase in mining related activities, manufacturing, and electric cars. Integrating the mix of various sources into the grid in a way that reduces greenhouse gases and toxic emissions and provides reliable electricity is complex and will be a challenge. However, wind energy will allow storage of hydro and minimise use of fuels such as natural gas or biofuels or which are not as "green" as wind. Environment North would like to see the development of a green energy plan for our region in order to utilise our energy resources most effectively and avoid a "piecemeal" approach.

The Nor'Westers are one of the best sites for wind generation in the region. It will be impossible not to avoid some damage from road and turbine site construction. It is our hope, however, that a compromise can be reached with turbine siting. It is a balance between maintaining a viable project, avoiding certain habitats and addressing various concerns of the nearby community. Adequate information on decisions regarding turbine siting should be provided to members of the public. Environment North does not believe that issues relating to the viewshed have a high priority. If the project proceeds, and a

Renewable Energy Approval Report is submitted, ministry experts will assess the plan and in particular determine if sufficient background data and mitigation plans exist regarding impact on birds and bats.

Generally corporate wind farms in Ontario do not directly benefit the nearby residents as they are not owned and operated by the nearby community - a model often utilised in European wind farms. Perhaps there are other creative solutions. For example, Horizon could help develop and maintain some of the cross-country recreation trails within the area and thus initiate a process of re-establishing Big Thunder as one of the best cross-country ski /mountain bike areas in Ontario.

Each country and community needs to make the transition to green energy. Climate change caused by the increase in greenhouse gases by burning fossil fuels is a global crisis. The production and combustion of fossil fuels also produces many toxic emissions affecting air and water quality. Thus Environment North's energy policy supports conservation, efficiency and renewable energy such as wind. Renewable energies also have consequences but protection of the global climate through reduction of greenhouse gas emissions is vital.