



## Are we turning away from wind power?

Richard Mueller of Phoenix, Ariz., enjoys a afternoon of windsurfing off Padre Island. In a world of constantly increasing energy demands, why don't we do more to exploit wind power? Todd Yates/Caller-Times

I was thinking about the power of the wind a few days ago, as I relaxed in the cockpit of my humble sailing craft, which was tied up at a dock in the municipal marina in Corpus Christi.

The wind was blowing steadily between 20 mph and 25 mph, with extended periods over 30, and gusts well into the 40s. A nasty chop was building in our shallow bay; loose halyards were rattling against masts all over the marina. Prudent mariners remained in port. Better to stay tied to the dock and consider the enormous, unseen force of the wind moving across the sky.

In spite of its invisibility, its power is immense. The physics is complicated, but the simple version is that the wind's power increases exponentially, rather than incrementally. You can easily convince yourself of this improbable fact by comparing a gentle voyage across a moderate 15 mph breeze with the behavior of your boat when the wind speed builds to 30.

In a world with a steadily draining gas tank and constantly increasing energy demands, why don't we do more to exploit the force of the wind?

Efforts are being made. According to the American Wind Energy Association, by the end of 2007 wind power generation in the United States was enough to satisfy the electrical needs of 4.5 million households. The association believes that as much as 20 percent of America's electricity could be supplied by wind power.

And what's not to like about a source of energy that's inexhaustible, non-polluting, decentralized, and secure?

Plenty, apparently. New wind power projects invariably generate significant local resistance, reams of litigation, and hours of debate before the councils of government. The Cape Wind project is a classic example.

In 2001, developer Jim Gordon proposed a modest offshore wind farm in Nantucket Sound in Massachusetts in order to provide power to Cape Cod, which gets most of its energy from coal-fired plants. Unfortunately, the wind turbines will be visible on the far horizon from the summer homes of the rich and powerful on Cape Cod's South Shore.

They mobilized to battle the project at every turn, enjoying support from the highest levels of government, including

Massachusetts Sen. Edward Kennedy and Gov. Mitt Romney. The fight continues today.

Spirited opposition

Here in South Texas we have our own version of Cape Wind: two proposed wind farms on this gusty coast have encountered obdurate opposition from the famous and powerful King Ranch. At the moment the wind farms seem to be winning, but the resistance is formidable and determined.

Why do wind farms generate such spirited opposition? Some people complain that the turbines are an ugly blight on the landscape.

But this is a peculiar objection in light of the highly visible energy infrastructure that already surrounds us in the form of power poles and wires, electrical substations and, in places like Texas, the massive industrial structures of oil and gas platforms and refineries.

Compared to a drilling rig or oil pump, a gently revolving wind turbine is a thing of beauty.

Wind turbines do, no doubt, kill some birds and bats, but this is another odd complaint in light of the incalculable mortality wrought on the natural world by the rest of our vast industrial footprint.

I suspect that our reluctance to exploit wind powerfully is partly philosophical or, maybe, psychological. The history of civilization is the story of our subjugation of the natural world and its energy sources. We're used to taking what we want and using it as we choose.

The wind, however, blows on its own terms, at times and at speeds over which we have no control. This implies a need for innovative engineering and creative energy storage. But the exploitation of wind power also implies the end of the era of thoughtless consumption of seemingly infinite energy supplies. The power of the wind is enormous, but harnessing it may require a challenging re-conception of our relationship with our world's store of energy.

In fact, using the natural world on its terms may be harder than subjugating it.

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