



Wind power; Companies plan \$2 billion investment

By ASHLEY RICHARDS, LAREDO MORNING TIMES
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A \$2 billion wind energy production investment in Jim Hogg, Webb and Zapata counties is projected to generate \$80 million of property taxes in 20 years while supplementing a deteriorating natural gas resource. Corpus Christi-based American Shoreline and San Diego-based Eviva Spinnaker Energy teamed up for the multiphase, 800-megawatt project, which was announced Thursday. Approximately 400 wind turbines, which take up less than two acres each, will be placed on ranches in the three

counties to produce electricity that will go onto the Texas power grid.

"Just as oil drove us in the last 100 years, as we look forward into the future, oil will have a role, but it's going to not have the only role," said Doug Wert, president of Eviva Spinnaker Energy.

The companies estimate the \$2 billion investment will create \$400 million in contracting services and more than 350 jobs during construction, with more than 30 full-time management and operations jobs once complete. Landowners will also receive \$300 million in royalties throughout the 20-year span, though it is not expected to last only 20 years.

"Wind's not going to die in 20 years," Wert said.

Idalia Davila, a property owner in Jim Hogg County, said her family was contacted about two years ago after the company studied the region and determined the Davilas' land had the highest point in the county. Intrigued by wind energy, the property owners began research and soon became enthusiastic about being part of an alternative energy resource.

While some critics of wind turbines are displeased with the visual elements they believe ruin the aesthetics of land, Davila and her family said it is not a major factor.

"The benefits would outweigh any of the negative impacts, and the negative impacts I think will be minimal," Davila said.

American Shoreline and Eviva Spinnaker Energy are in the permitting portion of the project, said American Shoreline President Patrick Nye (*post correction – should read Vice President*). Following that, they estimate phase I construction will begin in 2009.

Phase I includes installing a portion of the wind turbines for the Webb County project in an area near Mirando City and all of those going to Jim Hogg County. Phase II and possibly III include additional turbines in Webb County and those in Zapata County. Completion is expected by 2010.

"We're one of the fastest-growing areas in the country," Nye said. "We need that resource for South Texas."

Wind energy produced as part of this project will power 220,000 homes annually, Nye said.

Aside from the financial benefits, Nye and Wert also touted the positive environmental impact of wind energy. Wind energy consumes no water, emits no greenhouse gases and strengthens domestic energy stability, Nye said.

Wert estimated the approximately 400 wind turbines in these three counties will reduce greenhouse gas emissions in Texas by 1 percent annually, the equivalent of removing 283,000 cars from the roadways.

Avian studies have also been in the works for about a year to monitor migratory birds of species of interest the 14-story-tall turbines may affect.

Of the approximately 7,000 bird species found in this area, Wert said, only one, the non-native Botteri sparrow, was identified as a species of interest. Thorough bird and bat studies continue as the companies work toward receiving an avian permit, among many others.

"What we're doing is we're reporting species and providing data to the environmental community that they didn't even have," Wert said.

During their studies, the companies also discovered the wind here is a "capacity quality resource," meaning it can produce energy during peak demand hours. This area is capable of that, Wert explained, because the high demand hours correlate with the hour at which the wind blows the most.

U.S. Rep. Henry Cuellar, D-Laredo, is also working at the federal level to ensure the wind project is a success by convincing the Department of Homeland Security to issue the necessary permits.

"Basically they're saying ... this is too close to the border and we've got border issues we've got to deal with," Cuellar said about DHS's initial reaction. "They have now said 'I think we have now identified the problems' in their eyes."

Cuellar said that while DHS initially slammed the door shut at the possibility without even an explanation, he is making some headway.

Nye and Wert asked that the community embrace the project, as it is the only way to its success.

"We made a decision in 2002, and we think it's the right decision to bring wind to South Texas," Nye said.

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