Bliss Wind Farm Project: Town of Eagle, Wyoming County, NY

The Town of Eagle in Wyoming County, NY, is a shining example of the way a community can benefit from having a local wind farm in its midst. Eagle Supervisor Brett Hastings was a resident, not involved in local government, when Noble Environmental Power’s 100.5 megawatt wind energy project was completed in 2008 in the Town of Eagle. He says that not only is the town using its plentiful wind resources to help meet New York’s renewable energy goals, PILOT (payments in lieu of taxes) payments have resulted in reducing town taxes to ZERO and have been used to provide no-fee garbage collection, new snow plows, highway equipment and road improvements.

Eagle is located in the Allegany foothills south of Buffalo, New York. As Wyoming County is the largest dairy-producing county in NYS, the population of cows in Eagle is larger than the human population of approximately 1,200. With dairy farmers sometimes struggling to stay in business, the supplemental income from leasing their fields for wind turbines has helped farmers to stay on their land, keeping family traditions intact while providing local dairy products for Western New York.

The town had been looking for economic development ideas in the early 2000s and it received proposals for a large landfill project at the same time as the wind project. Hastings believes they made the right choice, supporting clean, renewable energy rather than the odors and constant, noisy truck traffic a landfill would bring. He estimates that, based on third party surveys conducted, over 90% of people in the town were in favor of the wind project when it was proposed, but a small number of vocal opponents got a disproportionate share of attention.

Those in favor welcomed the supplemental income to the town, school districts, and landowners; opponents were concerned about noise, health effects, and harm to wildlife. The Supervisor said that most residents now have positive views about the wind turbines and the “myths have been busted,” with no problems to health, wildlife or noise--he added that trucks on a local highway make far more noise than the turbine 1100 feet from his home.

The Noble Bliss Windpark consists of 67 General Electric 1.5 MW turbines at a cost to the developer of $210 million. It was awarded a New York State Energy Research and Development Authority contract, financing from General Electric Energy Financial Services and Noble was obtained, and construction was begun, all in June of 2007. The project was completed and operational in May, 2008.

Noble estimated at the time that the windpark will bring an estimated $121 million in new revenue to the Western NY economy over the next 20 years. Local and regional New York residents were hired during the development and construction phases, which provided hundreds of jobs, as well as for several long-term jobs during operation. Manufacture of wind turbines for local wind farms can also boost the economy of the United States, since turbines are expensive to transport so are more economical to manufacture domestically.

Wind energy, unlike fossil fuel plants, creates no acid rain, no smog, and no mercury or greenhouse gas emissions during its operation, a win-win situation for the planet and for residents living nearby. Noble Bliss Windpark’s generation meets the electricity needs of approximately 33,500 homes, the equivalent of 2.28 million tons of coal being burned over 20 years, without the toxic impact. Including Noble Bliss and two nearby wind projects in Wethersfield, Wyoming County has five wind farms which in total generate 435 MW of clean,
renewable energy.

Supervisor Hastings is pleased that this project has eliminated town taxes and garbage collection fees. He also commented that the Noble firm paved roads that were previously dirt roads and left the construction site in good shape. The local Letchworth and Pioneer school districts share 50% of the PILOT payments. Real estate values have risen, with more young families and local teachers buying homes in the town. Turbine lease payments to participating households also provide a significant source of income here.

One important alert for communities considering wind projects nearby: be prepared for fossil fuel industry-funded opponents to spread misinformation about negative aspects of wind farms. The Town of Eagle’s experience has clearly shown that this is not true; as Hastings observes, most residents are happy with living near these turbines, when they are correctly sited. Large scale scientific studies confirm that there are no significant effects on health, wildlife, or property values in communities with wind projects.¹

A solution to this problem might be to prepare residents ahead of time for the arguments opponents will present, and have plenty of evidence on hand from communities like Eagle which have been living with turbines peacefully for a decade. Providing clean, renewable wind and solar power is the way NYS and our planet will hold the line on climate change and do away with pollution from fossil fuel plants, saving us all billions of dollars in healthcare costs and damage from huge storms.

For more information contact the Town of Eagle at 3378 School St, Bliss, NY 14024.

The photos below were provided by Wyoming County Industrial Development Agency and are used with permission.

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Wind turbines, Wyoming County, NY  (Wyoming County Industrial Development Agency)

Wind towers, Wyoming County, NY  (Wyoming County Industrial Development Agency)
Wind towers, Wyoming County, NY (Wyoming County Industrial Development Agency)

Wind turbine, Wyoming County, NY (Wyoming County Industrial Development Agency)
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