

Proposed Baraga Wind Farm Promises Jobs and Revenue

Renewable Energy Systems (RES) began researching a potential wind farm site on Weyerhaeuser-owned timberland in Baraga County in November of 2014. The project has the potential to bring a myriad of economic benefits to L'Anse township and the surrounding area. Millions of dollars in increased tax revenue from this project could be used to improve schools and roads as well as support public services like fire and rescue. The project is expected to create up to 300 temporary jobs during its construction phase and could employ up to 8 full-time workers after completion. Indirect benefits include increased spending at hotels, restaurants, and gas stations throughout the area.

In addition to the recreational and economic benefits, the wind project would help diversify the Upper Peninsula's energy portfolio and bring Michigan closer to its 2021 renewable energy standard of 15%. Diversity in energy generation resources reduces susceptibility to fuel price fluctuations and can help stabilize electricity rates for consumers. This project would also bring increased energy independence to the community and reduce our dependence on imported coal, thus improving energy security.

RES sees significant demand for power generation across the region in the coming years and this wind farm, along with two natural gas powered electric generation facilities in Negaunee and Baraga townships, will help meet demand after the retirement of Marquette's Presque Isle Power Plant. However, as RES seeks a Special Land Use Permit from L'Anse township, residents have raised concerns about the impact a large-scale wind farm could have on their community.

Upon the project's proposal, many of the area's sportsmen became worried about access to treasured hunting land and ATV trails on the property. RES has recognized this concern and has plans to improve existing trails and return them to the public for use after completion of the project. Throughout the project, RES will be working closely with the Michigan Department of Environmental Quality and the DNR to ensure that appropriate steps are taken to protect water resources and minimize the impact on wildlife habitats. Although no turbines are proposed within 2.5 miles of existing homes, RES would be using a special serrated trailing edge technology to lower sound levels at property boundaries.

In addition to creating jobs and reducing our dependence on foreign fuels, the wind farm will help ensure that homeowners and businesses in the area get access to the best electricity rates available. The flow of electricity generated at the wind farm will be controlled by MISO, the regional transmission operator. MISO will be able to substitute electricity coming from other generation sites with clean renewable energy when economic indicators show that it is the most cost-effective option. This allows customers to get the most inexpensive energy on the market.

Michael Anderson is a member of the Michigan Conservative Energy Forum's (MICEF) 2018 class of research fellows. MICEF promotes an "all of the above" approach to energy generation and seeks to educate policymakers and the public alike on Michigan's unique energy challenges.