

Progress is blowing in the wind

Nolin Hills Wind Power Project could generate 350 megawatts of power

By PHIL WRIGHT
East Oregonian

UMATILLA COUNTY — Umatilla County's next wind farm could be its largest yet.

The Nolin Hills Wind Power Project would cover almost 45,000 acres on private land in the Nolin area about 4 miles south of Echo and 10 miles west of Pendleton. The facility could generate 350 megawatts of power, according to the project documents from the Oregon Department of Energy.

The Capital Power Corporation of Boston, Massachusetts, applied for the site certificate from the state energy department's Energy Facility Siting Council. The corporation is a subsidiary of the Canadian company Capital Power Development. Umatilla County counsel Doug Olsen said the project remains in a "holding pattern" while the Department of Energy waits on the company to submit a preliminary application for site certificate.

What the wind farm would mean for Umatilla County remains a question. County assessor Paul Chalmers explained the production of a wind farm dictates its value. The more energy it generates, the more it's worth.

But that value declines each year of operation, he said, as the turbines depreciate. Umatilla County has several wind farms now, including the big Stateline Wind Farm in the northern part of the county that went online in 2001. The farm produces a maximum of 307 megawatts. The project's value was more than \$89 million in 2003, according to Chalmers, but today the value is closer to \$26 million.



County counsel Doug Olsen said Vancycle entered into a Strategic Investment Program deal with the county in lieu of paying property taxes, and that's what most big wind farms tend to do. Under that deal, Vancycle pays \$2 million in taxes over the span of 20 years, but it also pays \$500,000 in community service fees each year of that same span. That money goes to local taxing districts.

Nolin Hills, Olsen said, would likely be big enough to qualify for a SIP. That means in rural Oregon the project would cost at least \$25 million and likely much more.

The Oregon Department of Energy's "2018 Biennial Energy Report" ranks hydropower as Oregon's largest electricity resource, and energy efficiency — doing the same work with less power — is No. 2. Wind is third, accounting for nearly 12% of Oregon's electricity generation.

Oregon has 44 wind farms in operation with a capacity of 3,383 megawatts and another 2,147 megawatts proposed, approved or under review, according to the report, and most of that production comes from Eastern Oregon.

Sherman County has 1,057 megawatts of capacity, and Umatilla, Morrow, and Gilliam counties combined have 2,179 megawatts.

While the state — and Umatilla County — wait on Nolin Hills, Portland General Electric and NextEra Energy Resources are building the Wheatridge Renewable Energy Facility, which combines wind, solar and battery power and spans Umatilla and Morrow counties. According to the Oregon Department of Energy, Wheatridge's wind production alone would blow out 500 megawatts.

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A wind farm near Arlington generates power.



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