

Comments to the Wind Power Task Force: January 9, 2008

By Steve Bennett

I would like to make a few final comments about the experiences of the Town of Freedom and again relate those experiences to the work of this task force. We do not have any Commercial or Industrial Development Review Ordinance in Freedom. We did, but the developer convinced the town this past summer to repeal the ordinance, saying to people that a vote to repeal the ordinance was vote for wind power, and promising that they would still only construct three turbines, and that they would obey the terms of the ordinance just as if it still existed. So now we have no sound or height restrictions; we have no decommissioning or safety requirements; and we have no right of review with the Code Enforcement Officer or the Planning Board. The only restriction is a 20 foot setback from property lines and a fifty foot setback from roads. Now we know that the developer has bought more land adjacent to the original site and is planning for more turbines. One could blame the citizens of Freedom for being short-sighted or gullible. I would blame it more on the developer's willingness to mislead people in a variety of ways, particularly their statements about how much taxes they would pay to the town. I believe many towns in Maine would vote for almost anything if it paid more taxes to the town. The experience thus far in Freedom has been a failure of process. We would have far more protection if we lived in an unorganized township and had LURC as our planning board. I asked a DEP official two years ago what the DEP's involvement would be in the Beaver Hill Project. The answer was not much. I asked why the DEP was involved in the Mars Hill Project and not Beaver Hill. The answer was the size of the footprint. I've since heard that small wind farms with 1-6 turbines likely will not come under DEP rules because of the size of the footprint. My answer to that would be that the current rules do not appropriately address the issue of industrial turbines. The size of the footprint is important if one is constructing an 18 hole golf course versus a miniature golf course. However, industrial wind turbines impact more than just the ground that they sit on. If you asked the people in Mars Hill if they are bothered by all the turbines, they will respond that the one turbine nearest their home is the real problem. One turbine, located too close to someone's home, is worse than fifty turbines at a distance, and our governing rules should reflect that reality.

On the other end of the scale, I have heard that the state should have a two mile buffer on either side of the Appalachian Trail because the trail is a special place. Homes are a special place to the people who live in them. I have trouble understanding why people are not as important as a trail.

I have heard it said in front of this group that people that live near turbines should just get used to the problems and stop complaining. That's very easy for someone to say if they are not the one who has to live near them. I would hope that this committee would be more sensitive and that its final recommendation would not reflect that view.

Above all else, industrial wind turbines should be located where there is verifiable and sufficient wind. The Grace Study identified 218 square miles of windy land in Maine and that was after deducting a two mile buffer for the Appalachian Trail. That seems like a lot of windy land. If we are going to provide tax credits, not just for R & D, but for ongoing financial support for tens of thousands of wind turbines, we should make every effort to locate them in places where they will produce the best results.

Finally I hope that you folks will recommend a state statute, not a model ordinance that very few towns will adopt, a statute that puts certain areas off limits, and that takes into account the impact of just one industrial turbine, not the size of the footprint created by the turbines