

Take a stand: Wind projects represent a threat to north country's economy

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The vast areas of farm land and hundreds of miles of scenic shoreline that distinguish the north country are the target of the insatiable political demand for green electricity. The pressure upon those whose lives are intertwined with those potential wind and solar factory farms is intense.

Here in the north country, Lewis County has hosted a massive array of wind turbines known as Maple Ridge for more than a decade. Now the region is the target for more wind projects. The 39-turbine project at Deer River is marching toward approval before the state Public Service Commission. The Galloo Island and Horse Creek projects now face the recently enacted Article 10 permitting process.

In southern Jefferson County and eastern Oswego County, Atlantic Wind LLC is proposing a turbine project in the heart of the Tug Hill. The Mad River project calls for 125 turbines, more than three times the number proposed at Galloo and only 14 fewer than at the Maple Ridge site. Some people fear that Mad River might be expanded to cover a much larger region of the Tug Hill Plateau.

The proposed North Ridge wind project is facing intense opposition from the residents of Hopkinton and Parishville. This well-organized opposition appears to be slowing the project's march through the state siting approval protocols.

The wind debate has focused on visual pollution with the tourism interests — the third-largest industry in the north country. People fear that spoiling the magnificent vistas of the shorelines of Lake Ontario and the St. Lawrence River with industrial wind sites will negatively impact the number of tourists attracted to visit or spend the summer here.

Further, the region is a major home to the threatened Indiana brown bat to the extent that the species must be considered when someone proposes a housing development. It would be beyond ironic if the bat stopped housing or commercial development but has no impact on a verified lethal danger to it. The region is in the path of a major bird migration flyway, especially Galloo Island. Wind turbines pose significant risk to raptors and migrating birds.

Since the expansion of Fort Drum more than 30 years ago, the north country has been united in arguing during multiple Base Realignment and Closure rounds that the post does not suffer from community encroachment allowing full use of the massive training areas available. However, now the community faces a potential encroachment issue that will weaken the case to maintain Fort Drum as a permanent training site.

There is a critical common theme for these wind projects: Radar distortion challenges air traffic controllers in safely guiding low-flying airplanes, drones and helicopters.

The U.S. Army already understands and has demonstrated to the Lewis County Board of Legislators the damage to air operations from Maple Ridge. But the proposed turbines are nearly twice as tall with much longer blades disrupting radar systems exponentially.

In addition, the turbines negatively impact the Montague weather station of the National Weather Service. Montague is the heart of weather forecasting and monitoring system for thousands of square miles from Lake Ontario to Syracuse and from Massena to the Adirondacks. It serves the weather forecasting needs of all the air traffic and local governments for highway safety, road clearing and school operations.

These turbine projects are driven by federal, state and local subsidies fueled by the political demand for what is perceived as low-cost power generated by prevailing winds. However, there is a severe cost to local taxpayers that extends beyond their federal tax bills, which subsidize the wind industry.

It is up to the Article 10 proceedings to analyze these costs:

Fort Drum is at risk if training of 10th Mountain Division soldiers relying on safe helicopter operations is threatened by radar shadows cast by the incessantly turning wind turbine blades. Training soldiers is the mission of Fort Drum.

And if that training is negatively affected by wind development, the Article 10 analysis should recognize the implication: If soldiers cannot train to defend the United States at Fort Drum, there is no need for the installation and all its jobs. Green energy is no justification for forcing the closure of New York state's largest single-site employer and provider of \$1.5 billion in economic activity every year.

The same can be said of the deleterious effect on weather predictions if the Montague weather station becomes less reliable because of wind turbine interference.

The radar interference also will negatively impact the use of the Tug Hill for the federally financed drone development program in Central New York from Utica to Syracuse involving hundreds of millions of federal tax dollars and the potential for thousands of next-era, high-tech jobs.

And lurking deeper in the background is a threat to a potential investment in an anti-ballistic missile system at Fort Drum to protect the Northeast and Midwest from nuclear-tipped missiles launched over the North Pole, a plan that became much more serious after the recent war of words with North Korea.

The community has a multifold task ahead of it.

First, it must clearly understand and then articulate the known impacts of indiscriminate wind turbine development around Fort Drum to the Article 10 process and Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo, who is pressing his green-energy agenda. Opposition is not an anti-wind or anti-green-power argument; it recognizes how the upstate economy needs to retain a vibrant training environment for Fort Drum's soldiers.

Second, community members must be steadfast in their opposition to adding a local property tax subsidy to the already large federal and state tax benefits available to no one other than wind developers. Jefferson County legislators must hold firm on their resolve not to provide property tax abatement. Oswego County has adopted the same position.

Lewis and St. Lawrence need to do the same. At no time should anyone think that Lewis County provided property tax abatement for Maple Ridge. Maple Ridge paid its full county, town and school taxes and then was reimbursed by the state. That program expired long ago, so any tax abatement will come directly from the pockets of homeowners and farmers who already shudder when property tax bills come in the mail.

Third, town governments working with the county must insist on a common, fully paid decommissioning plan for the day the turbines are obsolete and are merely twisting in the wind as rusting relics of the past. We already have enough abandoned barns and silos and vacated factories and businesses spoiling our land.

The Article 10 process must balance wind power development and destruction of the local economy. Fort Drum provides \$1.5 billion to the local economy.

Wind turbines do not provide jobs. Developers do not want to pay the same share of taxes imposed upon homeowners, farmers or business operators. Instead, they will co-opt local industrial development agencies by paying massive, one-time fees that benefit no one except to perpetuate the staff and advisers of these agencies.

The obligation of all elected officials is to protect the vitality of the region and organize a clear set of local policies that protect residents. Our major industry could be compromised, leaving the north country with fewer jobs and less disposable income. All of us are obligated to make the case to protect our economy.