

# The New York Times

## Idiot Wind

By HENRY S.F. COOPER Jr., Op-Ed Contributor  
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MUCH of upstate New York, from north of Albany to Buffalo, from the Catskills to the Adirondacks, is in danger of being transformed beyond recognition by industrial wind parks. Some 50 of these wind parks are being planned and even built.

All of this is being done in the name of clean energy and saving the planet. But it isn't clear that wind power is such a panacea in the battle against global warming that developers of these wind parks should be allowed to run roughshod over some of our loveliest land. What we need are statewide siting guidelines that take other environmental factors, including visual impacts, into consideration.

One upstate project, 70 miles west of Albany, is the Jordanville Wind Power Project proposed by Community Energy, a subsidiary of the Spanish conglomerate Iberdrola. The project is not far from where I live in Cooperstown. About 70 turbines, as tall as 40-story buildings, are proposed near the top of a ridge where they will be visible far across the Mohawk Valley to the north and to the south down the length of Otsego Lake, the centerpiece of the Glimmerglass National Historic District. There are six national historic districts and sites eligible or listed, in the area, covering some 40,000 acres. One that is eligible but not listed is the Holy Trinity Monastery, the spiritual center of the Russian Orthodox Church Abroad. Another, Glimmerglass, includes the landscape that inspired the artists of the Hudson River School and novelists like James Fenimore Cooper (an ancestor of mine).

The effects nearer the turbines will be even more devastating. The towers loom all around; their blades, 150 feet long, cause the sunlight to flicker; the nacelles – the hub of the blades – make a high-pitched whine.

Real estate values, certainly for second and retirement homes, but also primary residences, would likely plummet, damaging the local tax base. The carnage among birds and bats is considerable.

The Jordanville project would be built on an unstable soluble layer of karst limestone riddled with cracks, fissures and caverns. It could affect local wells and fish hatcheries; springs in this area are the source not only of Otsego Lake but of the Susquehanna River, which starts there.

Of course, the sacrifice of much of upstate New York in the name of saving the planet would be admirable and noble if it was clear that wind power would play a major role in combating global warming. But a recent study by the National Academy of Sciences casts doubt on this theory.

Wind is an iffy resource. It blows hard enough to generate electricity about 30 percent of the time. When wind-power companies talk of a project supplying electricity to, say, 60,000 houses, which is what the Jordanville project claims, those homes are dark and powerless 70 percent of the time. Or they would be, if it wasn't for conventional power sources, which need to be kept

on line to take over when the wind drops. Realistically, Jordanville will power about 18,000 houses or less. In the trade-offs between wind power and other environmental considerations, the less wind contributes to reducing global warming, the more important other environmental factors – including visual impact – become.

So why then are we destroying large tracts of upstate New York in the name of an uncertain energy source? In part, it is because the Spitzer administration, even more than the Pataki administration did, is increasing subsidies and tax credits for these alternative energy companies. Indeed most wind companies concede that if it weren't for government support, they wouldn't be in business.

The Spitzer administration has introduced wording to the Clean Economic Power Supply Act that would revamp utility siting law. Its Article X would speed approval for industrial wind parks, in particular by circumventing home rule and the State Environmental Quality Review Act, the cornerstone of the state's environmental laws, which is responsible for determining whether local ordinances conform with state environmental law when a town or municipality accepts or rejects a project.

But what we need to do is strengthen the siting provisions in the Clean Economic Power Supply Act. Three bills that are before the State Senate would impose moratoriums on wind projects while siting guidelines are established and the effects of a project on neighboring areas are assessed. One of the bills would give New York's Commissioner of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation a veto on approving turbine siting. All these bills are steps in the right direction; they have critical elements that are worth incorporating into the new Article X legislation, to assure burdened upstate towns that community character and historic and scenic resources will be protected.

Wind has a role to play, but perhaps not as strong a one as other clean energy sources, especially those like safer nuclear energy and cleaner coal, which provide not erratic but constant energy. We need to think carefully about where we place wind farms and whether the benefits outweigh the losses. But more important, we can't let wind power, and projects like the Jordanville one, distract our attention and financial resources from better solutions for saving our planet. Wind may be something of a red herring hidden inside a pork barrel.

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