

Testimony of Wendy Todd before the Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry Committee of the Maine Legislature

by Wendy Todd, April 30, 2007

Senators, Representatives, and Committee Members,

Thank you for allowing me to speak. My name is Wendy Todd. I am from Aroostook County. I am a resident of Mars Hill and live approximately 2600 feet from the Mars Hill Wind Project. I am here today to offer testimony that residents around the project are suffering. There are 18 families that I know of that are negatively impacted on a regular basis from the noise, strobe effect and shadow flicker from the turbines. Most of these 18 families live less than 3000 feet from the turbines. There is no one that I know of from 425 East Ridge Road to 212 Mountain Road that does not agree that there are issues with noise. Issues that are changing the way residents view life around the mountain. We have formed a group called the Mountain Landowners Association in an attempt to share information and come up to speed on the issues of living this close to turbines of this size and generation. We have had to struggle through massive amounts of documentation from the Internet and from other towns that are dealing with the same issues.

We have tried and I believe have succeeded in finding the answers to many of our questions but it has all been from our own efforts. We have received very little help from our town or the company that sited the windmills. Nick Archer with the Maine Department of Environmental Protection has been a helpful resource, but I believe even he would say that the State has a ways to go to educate itself on the pros and cons of wind turbines and how to best site a project. It would be a recommendation from our group for the State to look to California and other states in the nation that have been dealing with these issues for years, as well as other countries who have gleaned a great deal of information from years of studies, to help form guidelines to protect not only the land but the residents that live nearby proposed projects. We should learn from those who have gone before us. We shouldn't have to reinvent the wheel.

Let me make it very clear that no one in our group is opposed to wind turbines. We are for alternative, renewable forms of energy. Some from our group supported this project from the beginning. Some hated the project from the beginning and still do. Some were on the fence, but because of the points of renewable energy, landowner rights and proposed benefits for our town, county and state were swayed to sacrifice precious views of Mars Hill Mountain and our quiet with the disruption of the construction phase of the project. Nobody really knew or realized what was about to happen and how it would change our lives.

My husband and I moved to Southern Maine after we were married. We left for the adventure and for good paying jobs. We lived in Portland for 2 years then purchased our first home in Buxton, Maine. That house sat about 40 feet from the edge of Route 22 (a major route leading

to/from Portland) and was directly in the path of the approach to and from Portland International Jetport. The noise at that little house could reach unbelievable levels, but somehow we learned to deal with them. After 10 years of planning and saving we moved back home to Mars Hill where I was born and raised. The desire was to get away from the craziness of the corporate world, the noise that surrounded us and to seek solitude and a place to raise our children.

My family has owned land on Mars Hill Mountain for almost 100 years. My father and grandfather were potato farmers. I learned from a very young age to have a close connection with the land from my parents. They allowed us to carve out a small lot in the center of the family farm and we began the process of building our dream home.

Part of that process was to ask questions about the proposed wind farm. We learned early on that the town residences would not have an opportunity to vote on this \$55 million dollar project. I attended the Evergreen / UPC TIF meeting in Mars Hill, in November of 2004. At the meeting the question of noise was posed. The answers are documented. Basically the noise was described as silent, nearly silent and you would have to be 500 feet or less from the site to hear it. Printed documents and the UPC, Evergreen Web site stated that, "You will not be able to hear any noise at all at the bottom of the mountain." The morning after the TIF meeting I was at the town office and got to speak directly with Peter Gish from UPC. I told him where my parents lived and described where we hoped to build and asked whether noise would be an issue. He said, "You won't hear anything from these things." Our town manager confirmed that this was true because he had visited a site in Canada and heard very little noise being emitted from the site.

Perrin and I on a visit to PEI took a drive to the north shore to stand under the turbines there and found them not to be intrusive. We felt we had enough proof on the issue of noise that we went ahead and built our home. We figured that if we could deal with the aesthetics and the construction phase that we would be fine. If we had known then what we know now or if we had been made aware of the noise section of the permit with the sound analysis from RSE, we would never have built where we did. The report from RSE clearly stated that some residences would experience noise levels at or above DEP level limits. My parents own over 200 acres of land, many of which are much further away from the turbines.

Clear cutting began in the fall of 2005. I believe the figure is 150 acres of land that was cleared. Heavy equipment started the process of developing roads and in April of 2006 blasting started. We watched with heavy hearts as the North end peak was literally blown away. No one ever notified us of the blasting, but our houses shook, silverware and dishes rattled, and sheet rock dust fell as it took place. Soon the huge trucks arrived with the components of the wind turbines. Traffic was interrupted which made daily comings and goings difficult. The cranes arrived and the towers began to rise. People came from all over to watch. Cars stopped in the middle of the road to view the spectacle. People repeatedly left their vehicles to take pictures

with not even a thought to oncoming traffic. Residents with small children started keeping them inside due to the uncertainty of the increased traffic.

In early December #9 turbine was turned on and some residents knew immediately that there was something wrong. The noise from just that one turbine was unbelievable. That is when residents began to make calls, first to UPC, then to the town and then to the DEP.

I'm not sure why, but we are not getting used to the noise levels from the wind farm. In an attempt to find out why, we started researching the topic on the internet and I finally called a noise expert out of Massachusetts who was able to instruct us on why the noises that come from wind turbines are so offensive. I have those documents if any one would like to see them.

Are there other issues with wind turbines? Yes. Most of which were discovered after the wind turbines were already in place. Noise is the largest problem but shadow flicker and strobe effect are close behind for some of the residents. The rising and setting sun pierce through the blades of the turbines creating a strobe like effect in some of the resident's homes. For some it is blinding, even the best curtains and blinds can't remove the total effect. Some find that it makes them dizzy and disoriented; others find that it can cause headaches and nausea. It is only for 20 to 40 minutes a day (when the sun is shining) depending on the season of the year, but it is still an intrusion into the homes and lives of the people who live near the site. The strobe effect can be similar to the sun cutting through the trees as you drive (sun-shadow-sun-shadow).

Shadow flicker is when the shadow from the blades passes over the land and homes of people who live within a mile of the site. It too can make people feel disoriented. Some people complain that as they drive over a road that is being shaded that the motion draws them toward it (left or right) they find themselves veering into the wrong lane.

Residents are very concerned that the value of their properties has been greatly diminished. This brings fear to many of us because we have tied up most of our resources in our homes. What will there be for our children? Is it the same as it would have been before the turbines? Some residents have said that their way of life has changed so dramatically since the project that they would move if they thought for 1 minute that they could recover their investment. Please, keep in mind that these are people who dreamed of living behind the mountain. Who sacrificed many things to build the homes of their dreams with no intention of ever leaving. Imagine being driven from your home by a neighbor. Imagine feeling like you have no recourse and that there is nothing you can do about it.

Other issues that keep coming up are the risk of the turbines catching fire (consider fighting a fire 200 feet off the ground.) If there was a dry spell and the mountain was to catch on fire many of us would lose our homes.

Another issue is the potential for ice and snow build up on the blades in the wintertime, which during the melting process can be thrown hundreds of feet. (two teens at Big Rock ski resort witnessed an ice throw this winter)

There have even been documented cases of improperly anchored turbines falling over or collapsing and of blades breaking off and being flung. These are very rare cases but that doesn't make residents feel any better about the possibility. Some of these residents are only about 700 feet from turbine #1, which sits very close to East Ridge Road. So close that if it fell toward the road it would likely be in the road. Also posing a danger are the blades that are likely to break off and be thrown into nearby yards and homes.

We are only 5 months into the operation of this site. We are learning something new almost every day. The Mountain Landowners Association is requesting that the State of Maine put a moratorium on all siting of Wind Farms in the state until the issues at Mars Hill are reviewed and resolved.

My husband says...

It is sad when corporations are free to prey on small towns and small town government. He believes that corporations should not be able to push and bully their way into an area to take clear advantage of the inhabitants by withholding information, by leading them to believe fabrications, stretching the truth in order to achieve corporate goals at the suffering of Maine residents.

We have been asked by the Maine Department of Environmental Protection to remain patient while the sound analysis is being conducted and reviewed. Resource Systems Engineering (RSE) of Brunswick, Maine is performing the sound analysis. They (RSE) also happen to be contracted by UPC / Evergreen (the company responsible for the Mars Hill Wind project). This fact raises questions within our group as to whether the analysis will be fair. We have been assured by the DEP that this is a fair process. Unfortunately we have become skeptical of many things. Both the DEP and UPC have told us, that this could take a long time to resolve. The residents of Mars Hill will try to remain patient but we want for everyone to know that our patience is growing short with no hope of resolution in sight.

There are resident perspectives available upon request as well as other supporting documents.

Thank you for your time.