

Administration Wants To Identify Areas Off Limits To Wind Energy

Monday, 02/14/11 5:50pm

John Dillon - Montpelier, Vt.

(Host) The Shumlin administration hopes to ease some of the controversy over wind energy by identifying what areas should be off limits to energy developers.

As VPR's John Dillon reports, the administration's plan is not the comprehensive siting process that some environmentalists had called for. (Dillon) Unlike his predecessor, Governor Peter Shumlin embraces large-scale wind projects. While former Governor Jim Douglas criticized what he called "industrial" wind on Vermont's ridgelines, Shumlin is a booster of the big turbines.

Shumlin says the state could help promote this form of renewable energy in a number of ways.

(Shumlin) "I think the first thing we should do is identify all the places we will never put it and then we can have the discussion about a process that allows us to put it in the places that it should go."

(Dillon) The governor has asked the Agency of Natural Resources to start that work by pinpointing the places that should be off-limits to wind generation. Natural Resources Secretary Deb Markowitz says the screening process will not involve a state commission or panel that screens sites for wind energy. *(Markowitz) "This is purely informational, it's not regulatory. We have resources already that have been created over many years by a lot of scientists on the ground. And it really is an overlaying of existing maps, so that a person can ... take a look at a site that might have a high wind value but see right away that it happens to have a whole lot of different very special ecological communities that would be harder to replace by mitigation somewhere else."*

(Dillon) State regulators have already approved three large wind projects with several more in the pipeline. Some environmentalist groups have called for a comprehensive siting study of wind development involving interests groups and members of the public.

(Smith) "All I asked for is a seat at the table. We have not had anybody interested in listening to us about what a process would look like."

(Dillon) Annette Smith is executive director of Vermonters for a Clean Environment. Smith says the process should be more inclusive.

(Smith) "Allowing the Agency of Natural Resources secretary to make this decision about where projects should or shouldn't go, it completely ignores the human side of it. We are now apparently in a realm where we can mitigate the impact on the bears but the human species are being tossed out."

(Dillon) Brian Shupe of the Vermont Natural Resources Council says what Governor Shumlin has outlined makes sense as a first step.

(Shupe) "It's not ever going to be a substitute for a site analysis for actually looking at the impacts of a particular project on a particular property. The data just isn't that fine. It does, though, help inform a public debate. And it is a way to look at some of those areas where connectivity between large blocks of forested habitat is critical and fragmentation will be a problem."

(Dillon) Shupe says the state energy plan should be more specific about how much wind energy the state hopes to develop. Shumlin agrees, and he's called for a re-write of the energy plan.

For VPR News, I'm John Dillon in Montpelier

http://www.vpr.net/news_detail/90040/