

VPR News

Central Vermont Company Wants To Build Wind Turbines In Bolton

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John Dillon - Montpelier, Vt.

(Host) A central Vermont company hopes to develop a wind energy project on a mountain ridge near the Bolton Valley ski area. The project is in the research phase. But if it's approved, the half-dozen turbines could be the largest wind development visible from Interstate 89, or the Burlington area.

VPR's John Dillon has more:

(Dillon) Before energy entrepreneurs sink millions of dollars into clearing land and buying wind turbines, they have to know the potential wind resource. In Bolton, a company called Green Mountain Clean Energy won approval last month to build a 180 foot tower on Ricker Mountain to measure the strength of the wind. Ed Flanagan is a principal with the wind company and a vice president of The Point radio station in Montpelier, which owns a broadcast tower on the mountain. He says the equipment will gather wind data on the mountaintop for two or three years.

(Flanagan) "Then you go to the next step and say, 'What is the potential in that area to put up an electricity generating facility using wind?'"

(Dillon) The company is considering a utility scale wind project on the site, with six to seven turbines.

Although the plans are preliminary, the state Agency of Natural Resources has raised concerns.

The agency told the wind company this summer that the project could fragment what is now a large and undisturbed upper elevation forest. Eric Sorenson is a community ecologist with the Fish and Wildlife Department. *(Sorenson) "This whole area includes a whole slew of significant natural communities and rare species. Right in the area, where the project is being contemplated, and I realize it's still early for this project, there's a very good example of montane spruce fir forest which is our highest elevation forest type."*

(Dillon) Another concern is that the area is home to the rare Bicknell's Thrush. Sorenson says that construction for the wind turbines on the narrow ridge could require clearing a 150 to 200 foot right of way.

(Sorenson) "Generally there needs to be quite a bit of blasting, bedrock blasting, and the width of the swath that needs to be cleared to create that road for the cranes that put the turbines in place is fairly wide, and what creates the largest amount of habitat fragmentation, which is the issue we're largely concerned with."

(Dillon) But Ed Flanagan of Green Mountain Clean Energy says it's premature to talk about major impacts. He says the environmental issues could be mitigated by careful siting of the wind towers.

(Flanagan) "Vermont's aesthetics, Vermont's beauty, Vermont's energy, it's all important to us - as Vermonters. We're not an out-of-state company that's saying, 'Oh, we want to do this but we're not going to have to deal with anything that's going on.' We're a local company."

(Dillon) Flanagan says the first question that needs to be addressed is whether there's enough wind blowing over the ridge to justify the project. For VPR News, I'm John Dillon in Montpelier.