

Mountain slayers and profiteers

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Developers of mountaintop industrial wind are touting many promised benefits — from reduced greenhouse gas emissions and decreased dependence on fossil fuels to a huge economic renaissance. These are all false promises spun to enhance public acceptance. In recent months, as I have studied the economic and ecological impacts of mountaintop industrial wind, I have been amazed at the distortions and misrepresentations of the wind developers who, unfortunately, have been accepted without question by many in the media.

As an environmentalist, I have for decades supported a move away from our addiction to oil to more eco-friendly renewable energy, including wind. However, when I hear the developers spin the tragic Gulf oil spill to justify their desire to use our tax dollars to destroy Maine mountaintops with as many as 1,800 400-foot turbines spread over 360 miles, I am appalled by how this “justification” is so disingenuous. The truth is that only about 1 percent of our electricity is generated by oil. In Maine, almost all of our oil consumption is used for heat and transportation. Generating 2700 MW of mountaintop wind will not reduce our oil consumption or prevent ecological disasters like the spill in the Gulf.

Another favorite tactic of the developers is to promote mountaintop industrial wind as a panacea for climate change. While it may seem counter-intuitive, this also is a false promise. There has never been a coal- or oil-fired power plant closed down due to wind generation. Indeed, in Europe and China, where wind power has become a significant source of electric energy, greenhouse gases have actually increased significantly. It is simply not true that mountaintop wind will reduce greenhouse gases. Since wind is intermittent and not reliable, it is necessary to maintain backup power, or what is called “spinning reserve” to replace the wind power when the wind is not blowing. This has resulted in the need to build additional carbon-emitting power plants.

In China, this has meant a new coal-fired plant coming online each week. When the wind is blowing, it is necessary to reduce power from

conventional sources. It is simply not possible to just turn oil and coal power plants on and off in response to constantly changing winds. They can be ramped down, but their efficiency is compromised and the amount of carbon emitted actually increases.

If the technology were available to store wind energy, the problem of intermittency could be overcome. Unfortunately, this is decades away. In the case of mountaintop industrial wind, it is necessary to add to the carbon calculation the loss of carbon-sequestering forests due to massive clear-cutting on ridge lines and the construction of roads and power lines. If the 1,800 turbines were constructed, as much as 50,000 acres of carbon-sequestering forest would have to be clear-cut. In addition, turbines require electricity to run, which does not come from the turbines, but must be generated on site by diesel generators or brought in on separate power lines. Each turbine also requires as much as 200 gallons of oil lubricant, which must be changed on a regular basis. One study done in Colorado determined that wind power increased carbon emissions by 10 percent.

Finally, it is particularly disturbing to hear developers tout the economic benefits of mountaintop industrial wind. There is simply no way in a cost-benefit analysis that mountaintop industrial wind comes out as a good economic option. The cost of wind generation is two to three times more than conventional power — and this does not include the added cost of CMP's \$1.4 billion "bogus upgrade," which is necessary to hook up the industrial wind.

Our tax dollars in the form of huge subsidies are the only reason mountaintop wind, with its incredibly low efficiency, is being pursued. It is ironic that our tax dollars are paying for mountaintop wind, which will ultimately raise our electricity rates.

Developers like to tout the benefits of jobs and local/state tax revenues. Yes, it is true that during the mountaintop leveling and construction phase several hundred temporary jobs are created, but after construction is complete about one permanent job for each 12 turbines is created — so 360 miles of destroyed mountaintop would ultimately generate about 150 jobs.

While local property taxes may decline, this has not been documented in any place in Maine where wind has been installed. What has been

documented is that home values drop from 20 to 40 percent within a two-mile radius of a wind turbine. People do not want to live near industrial wind plants because of noise and visual pollution. State and county government may collect some tax dollars, but this will be more than offset by reduced tourism and declining recreational dollars. This is why North Carolina put a moratorium on mountaintop industrial wind. It realized mountaintop industrial wind would destroy the economic engine fueled by its pristine mountains.

In the end, the only folks who will benefit are the developers, who will walk away with millions of our tax dollars. Mountaintop wind can be called nothing less than an economic scam concocted by a few mountain slayers and profiteers.

Anybody who takes the time to seriously study mountaintop wind will come to understand its exorbitant cost and its negative environmental impact. A thorough and objective review of current literature could only lead one to the conclusion that mountaintop industrial wind is a disaster and should be abandoned.

It would be far better to target the investment of our \$5 billion in tax dollars earmarked for mountaintop wind to conservation through efficiency and weatherization. This approach would actually decrease our oil consumption, reduce greenhouse gases and create thousands of permanent jobs and business opportunities — things that mountaintop wind simply does not come even close to accomplishing.

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