

Wind Power: A Northern Ontario Perspective

The municipalities of rural Southern Ontario have soundly opposed and stalled the attempt of the government to initiate a new round of Request for Proposals for Large Renewable Procurements. This opposition has been based primarily on the harm wind turbines create for human health.

The Northern Ontario objection to wind-generated electricity is quite different from that of the South. The **health of the Northern economy** is the primary opposition issue to wind turbine developments. The Northern economy, which once relied on its primary resource-based industries, is currently facing an economic decline in those industries. This is in part due to the high cost of energy which has forced the closure of many sawmills, pulp and paper mills and fibreboard mills. Northerners are currently examining the potential for developing an expanded eco-tourism based economy. The Northern view is that its future prosperity can be restored utilizing the inherent values offered through its last remaining asset, an uncompromised wild landscape and natural environment.

Despite regional differences, Southern Ontario and Northern Ontario are both strongly opposed to the generation of energy by industrial wind installations. However, unlike the South, Northern Ontario's low population provides no voting power to impact government decisions. Much of rural Northern Ontario is unincorporated and has no official municipal voice to object. This requires support for the North from those in the Southern regions as opposition is only stronger with a unified approach.

Here's why Requests For Proposals in the North should also be stalled.

1. The Right to Self Determination:

- Because of the geographic differences between Northern and Southern Ontario, Northeastern and Northwestern Ontario have a right to determine their own economic destiny according to their regional values and available resources.
- Although Northwestern Ontario is "A Place to Grow Electrically" (See: <http://www.noma.on.ca/>), this vision does not include wind energy. The Big Thunder Wind Park proposed for Thunder Bay has already been scrapped in part because of First Nation objections to the impact on the natural environment.

2. Ontario does not need to generate more power in Northern Ontario.

- Northeastern Ontario currently provides sufficient energy for its own requirements as well as sufficient excess energy that feeds into the provincial grid.
- Algoma District has only 0.8% of Ontario's population and yet provides 6% of Ontario's wind energy:

- Prince Wind (2006) is the 4th largest wind installation in Ontario and the 6th largest in Canada at 189 MW capacity
- Bow Lake (2015) generates 58.3 MW
- Goulais (2015) generates 25.3 MW.
- Cities in Northeastern Ontario have excess energy as our forest industries have closed due to high energy costs. Sault Ste. Marie is looking to sell its excess energy to Michigan. See:
http://www.saultstar.com/2017/02/10/will-saults-excess-energy-be-sold-to-michigan?utm_source=addThis&utm_medium=addthis_button_gmail&utm_campaign=Will+Sault%27s+excess+energy+be+sold+to+Michigan%3F+%7C+Sault+Star#.WKHPZ5tAfc.gmail

3. Unfavourable Economic Outcomes for the Consumer:

- Generating electricity in remote northern locations requires long transmission to major consuming centers in Southern Ontario. This long transmission leads to energy loss. The technical term for this is "line loss." Line loss has the effect of making wind – powered electricity 30% percent more expensive than if it is generated near the ultimate users in densely populated urban centres.
- Moving more electricity from the north to the south will require a huge investment in transmission infrastructure. This investment will be reflected in further increases in the line item called "delivery charges" on consumers' monthly power bills.
- The construction of more intermittent wind capacity will require the construction of more off-setting natural gas powered generation. That will have to be built where natural gas supply is already available, which won't fit with remote northern locations. If natural gas generation facilities are placed in the North, then more pipelines to move the natural gas to those facilities will be required, and of course, the electricity will still be subject to the 30%-line loss cost boost when it is sent south.
- The terrain of Southern Ontario (vast areas of flat farm land) makes it easier and less costly to construct wind installations than on Northern Ontario's rocky terrain. Algoma Power Inc. (API) has the highest electricity rates in Ontario. The vast rocky plateau of the Canadian Shield is really hard on API vehicles—a cost which is passed on to their customers.
- Power generation from wind cost Ontario's ratepayers over \$1.7 billion (approximately 12% of total generation costs) in 2016 for just over 6% of demand. Further development of wind generation—especially from the remote North—will continue to increase ratepayers' electricity bills.

4. First Nations Treaty Rights:

- Northern Ontario wind power developments must be viewed in the context of the treaty rights of First Nations. Three of the most important treaties in Northern Ontario involve the Robinson-Huron Treaty, the Robinson-Superior Treaty and Treaty 3. These treaties cover an enormous geographic region of the province.
- The treaties are viewed differently by the Crown and First Nations. The Crown (provincial or federal) believes that it has the ultimate authority over a treaty and that the First Nations are subordinate. Crown decisions over resource development therefore are paramount.
- First Nations—especially the Anishinaabeg people who signed the Robinson Treaties—maintain that their traditional lands and waters and the resources therein were never surrendered, but exist today in a sharing agreement with the Crown. Hence all resource development on traditional lands must involve First Nations in agreement and management decisions.
- Suggesting that the North is largely unoccupied and therefore an easy mark for future industrial wind development ignores the huge issues that will arise from a lack of understanding of First Nations’ claims over their territorial lands. First Nations are now exercising their right to demand their fair share of profits derived from wind generation on these traditional lands. These profits from their partnerships with wind industries are currently raising the cost per Kw Hour proportionally according to the percentage of their ownership.

5. Eco-Tourism—A Natural Fit for a Sustainable Economy in the North:

- In a “green” world, eco-tourism must form an increasingly significant part of sustainable job creation in Northeastern Ontario. The imposition of wind turbine installations on coastlines (and perhaps *in* Lake Huron and Lake Superior) will seriously erode the value of eco-tourism as a sustainable economic base in regions which already rely heavily on year-round tourism.
- Algoma and Thunder Bay Districts have a vision of a sustainable economy driven by eco-tourism—a vision which has been supported by a million dollar Trans Canada Trail Grant in the creation of a Lake Superior Water Trail to be officially opened in June 2017 at Gros Cap in Prince Township north of Sault Ste. Marie. (For evidence of this see: <http://ijc.org/greatlakesconnection/en/2017/02/building-water-trail-lake-superior-community/#.WKPJFRmbEIs.mailto>)

As the following photographs reveal, the Lake Superior Basin is a national treasure which all Canadians and visitors to Canada have the right to enjoy in its natural state.

The people of Ontario have as a common goal the protection, conservation and restoration of the natural environment for the benefit of present and future generations (Environmental Bill of Rights, 1993).



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The natural unspoiled state of the shores and coastal highlands of the Lake Superior Basin is the legacy we leave for the benefit of tomorrow.

The authors of this article are members of the Save Ontario's Algoma Region (SOAR) Writing Team.