

Community works to share in profits from wind

BY TERESA BJORK

A new wind farm under development in the Estherville area will give local landowners an opportunity to share in the potential profits.

NorthStar Wind Farms, developed by Emmet County Energy LLC and Minneapolis-based National Wind LLC, will span approximately 30,000 acres across Emmet and Dickinson counties in northwest Iowa.

Construction on the state's largest community-owned wind project will begin west of Estherville next year, project organizers say. More than 70 landowners are involved in the project.

Unlike commercial wind projects that just lease farmland for the turbines, NorthStar gives participating landowners the option to own a share in the wind farm.

"It's just going to be a wonderful opportunity for our communities and our landowners," says Al Blum, an Estherville businessman and chair of Emmet County Energy. "It will be a huge economic benefit to the two counties."

On the cover

Wind generators help power a Green Plains Renewable Energy ethanol plant near Superior in northwest Iowa. The wind farms are owned by Iowa Lakes Cooperative. See article page 4A. Cover photo by Joseph L. Murphy

Community-owned wind projects aren't new to Iowa, but NorthStar stands out because of its size. This large-scale project will include 133 wind turbines generating 200 megawatts of energy.

Project partner National Wind says its model for large, community-owned wind projects is more economically viable than smaller community projects.

"This project is on a scale that can compete with commercial wind projects," says Erin Edholm, director of communications for National Wind LLC.

National Wind is developing 11 other community wind projects in Minnesota, Iowa, the Dakotas and Colorado. A second community wind farm, named Red Rock Wind Energy, is also in the early planning stages in the Estherville area.



BLUM

Prime location

National Wind first approached Estherville community leaders back in 2006 to discuss building a wind farm in the area, Blum recalls.

The company recognized Estherville's wind-energy potential. The town sits at the edge of the Buffalo Ridge, a stretch of land across the Dakotas, southwest Minnesota and northwest Iowa with some of the highest wind speeds in the nation.

Indeed, project developers have discovered through on-site measurements that the wind speeds in the Estherville region are even stronger than anticipated, Blum said. "It's like having a farm that kicks out 200 bushel (per acre) corn instead of 150. Its just more income for the project."



National Wind LLC is co-developing a 50 megawatt community-owned wind farm in Jeffers, Minn. A group in Emmet County hopes to build a similar project. SUBMITTED PHOTO

With National Wind's support, a group of local investors formed Emmet County Energy to raise funds towards the development of NorthStar Wind Farms.

The group contacted landowners who had the best potential sites for the project's wind turbines. Those landowners were given the first opportunity to invest in the wind farm. However, landowners also had the option to sign a lease agreement without an ownership stake, Blum explains.

"You do not have to be an investor to be considered for a turbine. We put the turbines wherever the wind-assessment folks say they need to be," he says.

Area landowners also could invest in the wind project even if their land wasn't identified as a potential site for a turbine.

Blum says the project generated so much interest from local investors that the

company had to turn away people at a local fund raising event.

"It wasn't very hard to raise the funds," Blum says. "It's a high-risk venture to build a wind farm, and we make sure everybody knows that. But we also expect some good returns once we get close to the end (of development)."

Community benefits

Blum says the NorthStar wind project will generate income for local communities as well as the landowners.

The wind farm will return about \$800,000 per year in lease payments to landowners and add to the tax bases of Dickinson and Emmet counties. Construction costs will total about \$500 million.

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Galva-Holstein Ag expands its energy portfolio

BY JOLENE STEVENS

Motorists looking for fuel-filling options are finding it easy to pull up and fill up with the fuel of their choosing at Galva-Holstein Ag's new retail blended pumps operation, according to General Manager Delayne Johnson.

The retail center, now one of 15 such facilities across Iowa, was the state's first blender pump when it opened at the south edge of Galva along Highway 20 in northwest Iowa.

Johnson, recipient of the 2009 Iowa Governor's Ethanol Marketing Award for the company's efforts to promote ethanol and expanding availability of higher biofuel blends, said his company is pleased with the motorists' response.

"If you go back historically, say 20 years, people just used gasoline," Johnson said. "Today, with E-30 and E-10 also readily available at the center, individuals can select from four options the blend they think is most economical for their vehicle and, at the same time, buy a fuel coming from the Midwest, grown and processed here rather than in the Middle East. In addition, they're using a fuel that's value-added to benefit local producers supplying the needed grain."

Offering fuel choices

Johnson said his company welcomed the opportunity to offer the additional fuels that are blended as they are pumped at the retail site.

"We have people specifically coming to the blended pumps when they're driving through the area. Some we find are even



Delayne Johnson of Galva-Holstein Ag says that consumers like the higher ethanol blends from blender pumps. PHOTO/ JOLENE STEVENS

going out of their way for the available fuels because they say they're finding them more economical than regular gasoline," Johnson said.

Installation of the two blender pumps, which can fuel four cars simultaneously, cost \$35,000 per pump. The cost was reduced because some of the infrastructure was already in place. In addition, the company was able to tap state funds that are designated for fuel infrastructure improvements, Johnson said.

Along with the new retail center, Galva-Holstein Ag has E-85 fueling centers in Holstein, Galva and Ida Grove. The company also operates a bulk fueling site for

E-85 and E-10 adjacent to the retail center and ships these products to within a 30-to-60-mile radius of the operation radius.

Building on agriculture

Galva-Holstein Ag also partners with other area agribusiness, including the Quad County Corn Processors plant, which processes approximately 11 million bushels of corn, the majority grown in the area, into about 30 million gallons of ethanol annually. In addition, it is allied with biodiesel maker Maple River Energy.

AirLiquide, a plant utilizing the CO₂ produced by Quad State's ethanol production to make dry ice, is also located at the complex. Yet another arm of the Galva-Holstein Ag operation is its Four All Seasons bio-based natural fertilizer.

In all, the businesses employ more than 100 people in the community. "To me, this is a very significant piece of the economy with a multi-million dollar payroll. These dollars get spread to the rest of the economy," Johnson said. "And when you have this many jobs, it also means more families in the area and more in the school district. Our schools thrive, and the communities as well."

Considering the impact of the northwest Iowa's renewable fuels facilities at the site near Galva, Johnson is optimistic about the future of the local industries and the renewable fuels industry overall. "Renewable fuels are definitely going to be a part of our country's energy plan as we go forward.

Stevens is a freelance writer from Sioux City.

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"The economic development benefits are just incredible when you look at the whole wind industry in the state of Iowa," Blum says. "Once NorthStar is up and running, it will be the largest economic development project in the two counties, ever."

Local jobs

In addition, the wind farm will require about 20 full-time employees for its operations and maintenance. Many of these jobs will be filled by graduates of the Iowa Lakes Community College's wind-technician training program in Estherville. The training program attracts about 200 students each year.

"It's absolutely incredible the demand

there is for these young folks to operate and maintain these projects," Blum says.

Emmet County Energy plans to complete all site permitting by the end of 2009 and all transmission permitting by the end of September 2009. The group expects to sign an interconnection agreement with a utility in the third quarter of 2009 and begin construction in 2010.

Blum says the local community will have input into the construction of the wind farm. The Emmet County Energy board, a team of three area landowners, will oversee the construction project.

"We're going to be very aware of issues like the drain tiles in farmers' fields, county roads and all the other issues that need to be addressed," Blum says.

For more information about the NorthStar Wind Farms, visit the Web site www.northstarwindfarms.com.