# Wind farm being planned for Zion Township

By Michael Jacobson, Paynesville Press July 15th, 2009

## Zion Township is going green. Green energy, that is.

Geronimo Wind Energy is planning a 95-megawatt wind energy project in Zion Township. Around 75 percent of the land needed for the project is currently under lease, and the project could come to fruition in two to three years.

Right now, Geronimo Wind is leasing wind rights on ag acreage in a ten-section area of Zion Township, just on the border with Lake Henry Township. "It's a great place for a wind project due to the wind resource, the land use (agriculture), and the transmission," said Charlie Daum, director of development for Geronimo Wind Energy.

Peaks in average wind speeds - known as peninsulas of wind - occur on low, flat land such as the edge of Zion Township, said Justin Pickar, a development associate at Geronimo Wind Energy. In addition to the cluster of wind, Zion Township is largely agricultural, ideal for constructing wind turbines, and it has access to the grid via the Stearns Electric substation on Co. Rd. 130 and the Xcel Energy substation just north of Paynesville.

When built, the project could have 40-60 wind turbines producing enough electricity to power 36,000 homes, according Geronimo Wind.

In addition to the sign up of landowners, Geronimo is doing a more detailed study of the wind with metrological towers on property owned by Lorie and Tom Floura in Section 31 and on the Ken and Ralph Schefers farm in Sections 16 and 17.

Landowners will benefit from the project economically (by the lease payments) and by contributing to green energy.

"It's economically a good thing for us to do," said Ken Schefers, who farms 500 acres with his brother. "But we also believe in wind energy. It's renewable. It's clean. It's the right thing to do." "We really like the idea of creating energy here and creating clean energy," he added.

"We both feel we can't rely on the energy sources we have for the past 100 years. We need to develop alternative sources," agreed Tom Floura. "At this point in time, this seems to be one of the most viable options." "I'd rather have a windmill in my backyard than a coal-burning power plant or a nuclear power plant," added Tom.

Landowners have been receptive and great to work with, said Daum and Pickar, but they do have questions about the turbines and the project. One of the top questions that Pickar fields is: How will this affect wildlife? There are no direct results about wind towers affecting wildlife, he said.

Tom Floura - who purchased 180 acres for pheasant hunting, solitude, and a future location for a house, while renting the ag land - was concerned about the possible effects of a wind turbine on pheasants, since it is important to him that they are not affected by it. "It is right to do as a global citizen," he said of placing a wind turbine on his land, "but it's also going on your property, which you bought for the solitude." Another common question, said Pickar, is: Where will the towers go? Unfortunately, that is a Catch-22 because they can't design the layout of towers until they get enough property signed up.

Dave Lauer, who owns 80 acres in Section 32, has enrolled his land and hopes to have a wind tower on his property. "As far as I was concerned, they could zig-zag them on our property every 300 feet," said Lauer.

"I have no qualms about it," he added. "I'll gladly fence around it, and I'll gladly farm around it." Lauer, who has owned his farm since 1982, also owns another 80 acres in Section 29. He has dairy cows but is not concerned about any affects on them.

Whether he gets a tower or not will depend on his neighbor[1]s involvement, meeting setbacks for the towers, and the final layout of tower sites.

Lauer thinks the project is good for the environment, good investment for Zion Township, and good in-

come for farmers. "I think it's a win-win," said Lauer. "If nothing else, $10,000 (per year) would be nice retirement income." "It's a heckuva lot better than sending our money to Saudi Arabia for crude oil. Why not capture the wind? Why not capture the sun?" Another landowner who is considering whether to sign with Geronimo thinks if farmers owned the towers, too, it would be more profitable for them in the long run. He wonders if his land value will be affected if he wanted to sell his land; the 50-year lease is pretty much for his lifetime, he noted. He also would have to work around the tower.

"If it's out in the middle of this 80, you've got to farm around the (access) road and the tower," he said.

If farmers were to build wind turbines on their land themselves, "I'd have a little bigger investment, but I'd have a little bigger return down the road," he said.

Geronimo Wind Energy, however, holds the rights to access the grid nearest to Zion Township, said Schefers, which makes them the only option for a large-scale project. Financing the project (at $3 million per tower, more than $100 million in total) is quite substantial, he added.

Zion Township, due to the wind, has been the site for a proposed wind project before, noted Schefers, and it would be nice to see this project come to fruition.

Based on the payment formula for enrolled land and turbine sites, Schefers expects that each wind turbine could generate $10,000 annually for the landowner. If you take the proposed payments from wind energy and divide it by acre, it could equal their net profit per acre from farming, added Schefers. "We, in a sense, are going to be doubling our net income from farming." Schefers and a neighbor did hire an attorney to negotiate the lease wording. Among their concerns were: blade flicker, which is shade from blade which must be 1,000 feet from a residence; the "swooshing sound" noise, with newer turbines being quieter; and accessing their fields (with a wind turbine and access road on their property.

It helped, said Schefers, that the founder of Geronimo Wind (Rahn Group) grew up on a farm in southern Minnesota and was very attuned to the concerns of farmers. "That was just a big plus for us," he said. "They call themselves "farmer friendly." And so far, they have been." The Schefers brothers milk 75 cows, with the reputation of having one of the top dairy herds in the area. They have no concerns about their cows' health, said Ken. There's been talk of stray voltage, but there's no data and they've never had trouble with this in the past. "I'm confident that it's not a worry," he said.

Basically, Schefers said, they will be harvesting the wind from their land in addition to their crops. "I do hope it works out," he said. "I think it'll be good for the landowners and the community. I actually feel for us it's going to be a really nice income." Both the Flouras and the Schefers have a meteorological tower that has been erected on their properties. These towers collect wind information at four levels: 10, 40, 50, and 60 feet. The solar-powered towers relay the information by cell phone, recording the wind direction, speed, and density, said Pickar.

This data is needed to show to potential investors and convince them of the future success of this wind project.

Geronimo Wind Energy, a four-year-old company based in Edina, has completed 20-megawatts wind farms by Marshall and Odin so far. They are also planning a 45-megawatt project near Albany.

Once the land is leased, the wind is studied in greater detail, and the financing is set, the final design of wind turbines can be made. Required setbacks for the tower locations include to roads, non-participating property lines, wetlands, and residences.

The project will likely use either 1.5-megawatt or 2.1-megawatt wind turbines, said Pickar. These turbines would stand around 200 feet tall and have three blades longer than 100 feet. The tops rotate to face the wind, stopping and turning to face the right direction when the wind shifts.

Minnesota, according to the American Wind Energy Association, currently ranks fourth in the United States in wind energy production. (Texas is first with 7,607 megawatts, followed by Iowa, 2,883 megawatts, California, 2,653 megawatts, and Minnesota, 1,803 megawatts.) Lorie Floura, who is the secondary school principal in Paynesville, thinks the project is a great educational source on alternative energy, as well as a way to create green energy. "You're actively trying to change the way we live," Lorie said of the demand for clean energy. "I think it'll be nice to have something in our backyards that shows it."

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