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Published: December 03, 2008 12:23 am



Wind energy company promises donations

Sarah Moses

Cumberland Times-News

KEYSER, W.Va. — As U.S. WindForce prepares to present its application to the West Virginia Public Service Commission, Dave Friend, vice president for sales and marketing, said the company is looking to do more with the community.

"We've been working at the community level for a while," Friend said. "We formed a community advisory panel, which has a cross section from the Keyser, New Creek and Elk Garden area. The goal was to involve the community in our planning process."

That also includes, he said, a community benefits fund, which would give \$50,000 the first year and \$20,000 every year after that as a blanket donation to the public through major community groups.



Tom Braithwaite of Elk Garden said the outreach effort seems to be something U.S. Windforce is doing to garner support for the project, which is expected to generate 55 megawatts of power.

He said he didn't feel the county would necessarily be getting a lot of money in terms of taxes or seeing many jobs



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created through the project.

As a member of the Mineral County Development Authority, however, he said he wants to see every possible business project succeed in the county, but seeks a balance between the "return to the county as to what the cost is going to be visually."

Braithwaite said that, personally, he had mixed emotions on the project. He also said with new technology there is bound to be opposition and, for the most part, people will grow accustomed to them, using telephone and electrical poles as an example.

Friend said over the course of the next 25 years, the 23-turbine Pinnacle (Ridge) wind farm would generate a number of benefits to the county, including \$12.5 million in lease payments to the property owner, \$9.3 million in property taxes, and provide five to six permanent positions, with about 100 positions during the construction phase. The community benefits fund would be in addition to those figures.

Anne Palmer of New Creek said she feels the project is something that needs looked into, not only as a business or possible income through taxes.

"I feel we have to check into alternate energy," Palmer said. "Right now, it's such an important issue to have alternative energy and a plan. I'm very encouraged by the windmills."

While Palmer is director of the Mineral County Chamber of Commerce, she said she was not speaking on behalf of the chamber and that the chamber has not taken an official stance on the Windforce project.

Braithwaite said he felt the pressure for alternative energy and, while still present, had diminished with the recent lowering of some fuel prices.

The project is expected to be presented to the state Public Service Commission in early January, and Friend said the permitting process requires 300 days before any construction can begin. The state permitting process is slow, he said, because it is a time when a lot of information on the site and from the people needs to be gathered.

Contact Sarah Moses at smoses@times-news.com.



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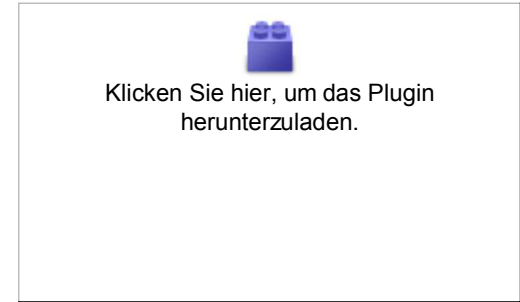
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