

Wind farm proponents gather in Alabama

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Newly-formed group invites guest speakers to talk about experiences with alternative energy sources

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ALABAMA — Shortly after Mark and Vivian Williams moved to their home in the countryside, the Macomber Road residents learned the town was considering a wind farm.

She was a country girl from the Finger Lakes, and her husband, an electrical engineer, was from the Tonawandas.

“We were newcomers here, and we wanted to know the truth about what was going on,” Mrs. Williams said, as she busily greeted residents at a meeting of WI+RE Thursday night at Alabama Fire Hall.

The Williams founded WI+RE (Wind Information + Responsible Energy) to find the best sources of correct information about wind turbines.

Their members number about two dozen, and include some very educated people, she said.

Thursday’s “Wind-erfest,” as they named it, drew more than 100 residents from Alabama and neighboring communities, who came to hear four speakers talk about their experiences with wind power.

Williams said the speakers were not paid and had no connection to any wind energy companies.

Alabama resident Loran Klotzbach welcomed guests and said wind energy has been a big issue in the town for the last four years.

“We tend toward skepticism of information given to board members and printed in the paper by wind companies,” she said.

“We want to hear accurate information from people in the know,” said Mark Walter, a science teacher at Oakfield/Alabama High School for 22 years, who acted as moderator for the evening.



Virginia Kropf/Daily News

TOURIST PROMOTION: Donna Griffin, who resides on the Fenner Wind Farm, shows residents at the Alabama WI + RE meeting Thursday night the T-shirts she had made as a joke to promote the project. Now they're selling like hotcakes, she said. At left is Dereth Glance.

Walter has been interested in wind energy, and recently assigned his class a project, where he divided them into two sides — pro and con — and had them research wind power. Several of his students were offered extra credit to attend Thursday’s presentation.

The first speaker was Dereth Glance, program director for Citizens’ Campaign for the Environment and vice chair of the board of the Onondaga County Resource Recovery Agency.

“We are at an energy crossroads in New York and in the country, with demands for power increasing at 1.2 percent a year,” she said. “With rising demand comes rising costs.”

She said to generate 350,000 megawatts of power would use 180,000 tons of coal, 560,000 barrels of oil or 2,500,000 BTUs of natural gas. To generate that amount using wind energy would use no costly resources.

Currently, 50 percent of the country’s energy comes from fossil fuel, and because of the effects on global warming, polar bears are drowning; loons are dying of mercury poisoning; and 500 lakes in the Adirondacks cannot sustain life because of acid rain, Glance said.

She said in Denmark, 20.8 percent of energy is generated from wind-mills.

“They have proven they can grow the economy and reduce fossil fuel usage at the same time,” Glance said.

Bill Nowak, executive director of Buffalo’s Green Gold Development Corporation, said the way people create and react to renewable energy is

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Bill Nowak
Green Gold Development Corporation

going to have a profound effect on their future.

Wind is the "crop of the 21st century," Nowak said.

"If you want to keep farmland rural, a wind farm provides the best opportunity for farmers to keep their farms and still work them," he said.

He said a parcel of land which yielded a farmer \$90 worth of corn, \$40 worth of wheat or \$5 worth of beef, could result in a payment of \$2,000 and more for a wind turbine placed on it.

Nowak said looking at wind turbines is like looking at an ink blot.

"What you see in it is what is in your mind," he said. "I look at a wind turbine and see hope for my children's future."

Ramon Cipriano of Bethany grew up in Warsaw and East Bethany. He has degrees in physics and a master's and Ph.D in atmospheric physics. He is a member of the Bethany Planning Board and saw his town take action recently to ban wind turbines.

"If you are going to ban wind turbines, then you should also ban automobiles," Cipriano told residents. "Automobiles are much more dangerous than windmills."

In addressing the concern of ice throw, Cipriano produced equations which indicated the furthest a piece of ice could go, if conditions were just right, was 2,438 feet.

"People have said ice can be thrown two miles — and that is just not true," he said. "You have a

500,000 times greater chance of being killed by a car than by ice throw from a windmill."

The final speaker, Donna Griffin, lives on the Fenner Wind Farm with her husband. She is a member of the Fenner Town Planning Board and is a director on the Fenner Renewable Energy Board.

"I'll tell you what it's like to live with 20 windmills," she said. "There are two on my property. They are not noisy and they do not produce flicker."

There are three people out of Fenner's 2,000 who do not like windmills, Griffin said.

"They said they have a problem with flicker, but I couldn't figure out what it was," she said. "Then one day the sun was directly behind a wind tower and for eight to 10 minutes, I saw a little flicker. But, the sun has to be just right, the wind has to hit the rotor just so, then you might get a little flicker."

One windmill is 1,200 feet from her house and Griffin said if she is having a normal conversation in the house, she cannot hear the windmill.

"You have to get within 150 feet of it and then be quiet to hear it," she said.

Since the wind farm was put in, Griffin said farmers love the access roads, because they don't have to drive through the mud to get to their fields. Also, the monies paid by the PILOT program covered almost one-half of the town's annual budget.