

# Area wind farm hopes to be producing by 2012

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## Meade County News

A wind farm that is projected to be built near Plains is about half way through its development process and could be selling commercial power by late 2012.

Representatives of the “Cimarron Wind Project” met with the Meade County commissioners last week to give an update on the wind farm’s progress.

They also met with the commissioners to seek a resolution in favor of the proposed wind farm. That resolution was approved.

Jeff Schlichting was the chief spokesman for the wind farm. He was joined by Kismet area farmer Jon Handy – who has been working with area landowners in the development of the project. Schlichting explained that the Cimarron Wind Project is owned by Energy for Generations, LLC of Tulsa, OK.

Although the parent company is located in Oklahoma, Schlichting said that all of the partners working on the Cimarron Wind Project were native Kansas.

Schlichting added that he had 20 years experience in the renewable energy field. “We’ve got a lot of experience, not only in renewable energy, but also in farming and ranching – what we consider to be the original sustainable industries,” he said.

“We believe that we will understand the issues of the landowners and the stewardship of the land.”

Schlichting said that the Cimarron Wind Project would be located to the north and west of Plains and would cover 93 square miles.

The project area is roughly a rectangular shape that is approximately 15 miles long and 6 miles wide. It begins near the northwest corner of the City of Plains and extends to the west to within one mile of highway 83. The entire project area is located one mile north of highway 160 heading west from Plains.

Schlichting said that the wind farm will be located in both Seward and Meade Counties. 44% of the site is located within Meade County.

Once completed, Schlichting said the Cimarron Wind Project could contain about 400 windmill towers with an overall production capacity of 1000 megawatts.

“We’re talking about a state-of-the-art, world-class, facility using the absolute best technology,” Schlichting said. “We’re looking at using top-flight technology and construction techniques on this facility.”

Although the general area of the wind farm has been outlined, the exact location of individual windmill towers has yet to be determined

“We haven’t made any final determinations as to where the turbines are going to go,” Schlichting said. “We haven’t decided on where any of these are going to go yet.”

Although his parent company has wind projects in Oklahoma and eastern Kansas, Schlichting explained why they looked to western Kansas for a new project.

“We think it’s a well sited wind project,” he said. “It’s windy everywhere in southwest Kansas, but this really is in the middle of a wind hot spot.”

Schlichting further stated that when his organization first started looking for a wind farm site nearly three years, they initially looked at a site that was located entirely in Seward County.

However, initial monitoring of that location proved unfavorable and the group then looked to the site near Plains.

“The wind resource did not appear as favorable there as the site we have now identified,” he said. “Preliminary data indicate a very strong wind resource here, but that’s not a surprise to anyone who’s lived around here for any amount of time.”

Schlichting told the commissioners that there are ten different phases of developing a wind farm. He further explained that the entire development process takes about five years to complete.

He said that state and federal regulations play a major role in the timetable of development. “We have to go through a whole laundry list of processes to make sure that our product will perform to the regulations,” he said.

Currently, the Cimarron Wind Project is about half way through its development stages, Schlichting said. Area residents could see windmill towers going up as soon as late 2011. “Construction itself, once we’ve actually started construction, can be relatively brief,” he said. “Maybe six to nine months.”

He added that the project hopes to be selling power by the end of 2012.

Once that power goes on the open market, it will probably be transmitted to the nation-wide power grid on a soon-to-be constructed interconnect transmission line. Schlichting said that line is slated to be built in 2012-2013.

“The interconnection will be with one, or possible more, of the lines that are planned for this part of the state,” he noted. “There’s been quite a bit a work to develop transmission to southwest Kansas and the Oklahoma panhandle in order to export the wind resource that’s out here.

Ironically, most, if not all, of the power produced by the Cimarron Wind Project will not be used by area residents. In fact, it probably won’t even be used by anyone in Kansas, Schlichting explained. “There isn’t necessarily load in-state for a project this large, but there is an appetite to the east,” he said.

Nonetheless, he said that area residents would benefit from the financial impact of the new wind farm. Schlichting explained that wind farms do not own the property where they are located, rather they lease the ground from the current landowners.

“It obviously provides an additional income stream for the project landowners,” he said. However, he would not comment on exactly how much money the towers would be worth. “I won’t go into the details because of confidential agreements.”

“There is no inequity among the landowners,” Schlichting added. “Whatever deal we settle on in a lease, is the same deal applicable to everyone involved in the project.”

While the production of renewable energy is not currently taxable under Kansas state law, Schlichting said that the Cimarron Wind Project would adopt the industry standard of making “payments in lieu of taxes” to both Meade and Seward Counties. “We want to be good corporate citizens with this project,” he explained.

Again, Schlichting hesitated saying just how much those payments might be. “We have to be very careful from a legal prospective that we take these in the right sequence,” he said. “If someone were to perceive that the County was doing a quid-pro-quo for the approval, it could jeopardize the progress of the project.”

“I’ve been through that before in Kansas,” he added.

Schlichting said the construction and operation of the wind farm would have other economic benefits as well. Once construction begins, it could result in as many as 150 to 200 construction jobs for the area. Depending on the final size of the project, it could employ as many as 80 to 100 permanent jobs.

“There are all level of skills involved in the construction and operation and maintenance of the project,” he said. “These are good jobs, these are permanent jobs for skilled technicians.”

Once the wind farm is up and going, Schlichting said it will have little impact on the ground. “Of the total acreage, typically two to three percent of the land in a wind farm is actually disturbed,” he said. “Probably even less than that is actually taken out of production.”

“Whether it’s for grazing or for crops, the ground continues to be used,” he added.

Because of the latest technology, Schlichting said the towers make little noise. “The sound of the wind and the birds, and sometimes the sound of the cattle, are actually louder than the sound of the turbines,” he stated.

In meeting with the county commissioners, Schlichting tried to allay any concerns that the new facility might present to local government. He said that the Cimarron Wind Project would enter into a road maintenance agreement with both host Counties.

“We do not want to increase the burden on the County in any way,” he said “We will maintain and restore the roads that we use and will be responsible for any damage that we do.”

“If there are pieces of roads that need to be built up to handle the construction process, we will handle that,” he added.

Schlichting also said that the Cimarron Wind Project would agree to remove the turbines and towers if the company ceases to use the facility.

However, he said that it was unlikely that the company would cease operation for any reason – even in the case of natural disaster. “It’s a pretty big capital project, any of the investors will require replacement insurance,” he explained. “When you take one of those turbines out of production, it’s a significant loss in the revenue stream.”

“From a financial prospect, the project will be very motivated to replace those.”