


[Home](#) | [Contact](#) | Text size: [s](#) [M](#) [L](#)

Subscribe 

Search 

[Industrial Wind Action Group](#)

facts, analysis, exposure of wind energy's real impacts

- [About](#)
- [News](#)
- [Opinions](#)
- [Library](#)
- [Press](#)

News Articles

- [By Date](#)
- [By Topic](#)
- [By Location](#)

search news

 [Send to a friend](#)

News Articles

Is sense blowing in the wind? - An article by two local academics questions the faith many people put in wind power

WILKES-BARRE – Call it “Don’t throw caution to the wind (mill).”

February 27, 2006 by Mark Gydish in Timesleader

In what one co-author concedes is “kind of ironic,” two King’s College environment professors – one teaches politics, the other science -- wrote a paper questioning whether windmills are really an earth-friendly way to make electricity.

The “commentary,” published in the Journal of the Pennsylvania Academy of Science, is titled “Wind Power in Pennsylvania: It isn’t Easy Being Green.” And though it cites many sources, the turbines in Bear Creek Township crop up as prominently in the article as they do in real life.

Brian Mangan and Joseph Rish point out that they don’t oppose wind turbines. But they question whether advocates, designers and politicians have thought things through when pushing wind. In the article, they let the “what ifs” hit the fan:

- Proponents contend wind power can reduce the use of fossil fuels burned to produce electricity. But the authors

point out that wind turbines only provide power about one-third of the time, at the whim of the wind, so coal plants must stay on line all the time regardless of how many windmills you build, and additional plants, usually fueled with natural gas, must be available for peak demand periods.

What if you could store the electricity for later use (not yet feasible)? To replace one typical coal-fired plant, the duo estimates you would need a wind farm covering about 19 square miles. That's three times the size of Wilkes-Barre.

- This leads to a potential irony: What if the average person is convinced those windmills up on the hill signify guilt-free electricity? "I think if we promote this as energy that is as free as the wind, we're almost telling people there is no need to conserve," Mangan warned.

The article notes that some universities pledged to get a minimum percentage of their electricity from wind generation, then increased conservation in order to cover the higher cost, but there is no reason to believe the general population reacts that way.

- Lastly, what if wind turbines damage the environment they allegedly protect? The fact is, they do. Forests are cleared, roads are built, and animal habitats are changed. The article argues those risks can be mitigated, but the real danger may be in who gets to say where windmills go.

While the federal government requires an environmental impact statement, that mandate can be bypassed by building the turbines without federal help, as was the case in Bear Creek Township, the article says. The state is almost always involved, but often focuses on how the project impacts water, soil or sewage.

"The decision to grant permission to build and ultimately approve a wind plant is held by the local government," the authors wrote, and that jurisdiction often is limited to whether or not the turbines meet planning and zoning ordinances, not environmental criteria. Cash-strapped municipalities may be hard pressed to justify blocking construction and giving up potential income.

The authors suggest national energy policy might be better served if state or federal agencies were more involved, or if local officials were given more training in deciding when and where to allow wind turbines.

The article touches on one other topic dear to Mangan's heart: Birds flying into the turbines. After all, he started his career counting dead fowl carcasses around the Susquehanna Steam Electrical Station. He found a lot of birds – 466 in one year – crashing into the nuclear plant's cooling towers and dying. That was before the plant was operating. Once the towers "went on line, they generated enough noise so that mortality was not an issue."

While the towers are almost twice as high as the turbines, the concern is that birds fly lower in bad weather, and the solution may be as simple as equipping the turbines to make noise during migration season when the weather turns ugly. Curiously, bats also hit the mammoth wind turbines, despite the fact that they spend their nights detecting and zeroing in on insects for food. That phenomenon merits more study, Mangan said.

The bottom line? Mangan and Rish don't want to see wind turbines blocked, they just want more thought put into their placement and use. In particular, they want people making the decisions to scrutinize the sites, to actually spend time walking around and observing things like local bird flight patterns.

"Until you get your butt actually in the field to see what's going on," Mangan said, "you really don't know."

</tbody>

Web link: <http://www.timesleader.com/mld/timesleader/1397154...>

Filed under : [Pennsylvania](#) : [General](#)

[< prev](#)

[next >](#)

Note: this article may be subject to the [Fair Use Notice](#).

[Home](#) | [About](#) | [News](#) | [Resources](#) | [Press](#) | [Contact](#)

[Login](#) | [Terms of Use](#) | [Privacy](#) | [Fair Use Notice](#)

Website by [Parkerhill](#)

Powered by [Xaraya](#)

© Copyright 2006 IWA