

Green Realism

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A proposal to construct 22 wind turbines in Highland County has been met with both optimism and skepticism. The county's leadership, which will visit the issue shortly, will take a deliberate approach in dealing with the proposed wind farm. Says board of supervisors chairman Robin Sullenberger, "In many cases, it boils down to aesthetics, view-shed issues, and potential revenue issuesWe're all supportive of the concept of green energy resources, but we are also aware that the local impact has a bearing on that."

The politician's comments reflect the attitudes of the environmental community, and the dilemma it faces regarding windmills. Environmentalists seek alternatives to fossil power stations but routinely oppose giant turbines with 100-foot blades rising hundreds of feet on mountaintops or out of the ocean. It seems greens support the concept of wind power, but have yet to see a plan for wind energy they could accept.

On the plan in Highland, environmental critics say their opposition has to do with wind turbines affecting (a) the natural grandeur of the Appalachians and (b) the migratory habits - and lives - of birds and bats. One told a Virginia newspaper, "Every postcard you see, every piece of art that comes out of Highland County, reflects the beauty of the mountains, not the beauty of wind turbines on top of them." Another said, "It's out of control right now. There is no regulation right now, they could be killing hundreds of birds, and there would be nothing stopping them. It's really interesting because it's green energy, but you don't want to put these things up where they are killing birds."

But does the dilemma exasperate only environmentalists - or is it reality? As much as they would like to replace coal-burning plants that produce fly ash, are they satisfied that a wind farm with 22 turbines they consider unsightly and dangerous would generate only 39 megawatts of electricity? That compares with 850 megawatts at the Clover power station, 350 megawatts at Yorktown, 1,300 megawatts at Chesterfield, 760 megawatts at Chesapeake, and 1,600 megawatts at Mt. Storm.

Do enviros take potshots at potential wind farms because they realize so-called green energy is neither effective nor efficient?

This story can be found at: http://www.timesdispatch.com/servlet/Satellite?pagename=RTD%2F2FMGArticle%2FRTD_BasicArticle&c=MGArticle&cid=1031777536911&path=%2F21editorials&s=1045855934983