

My faith in green technology is blowing in the wind

There's a farmer in Northumberland County, east of Oshawa, who wants to build a house for his daughter on his farm, but he can't because he's on the heavily protected Oak Ridges Moraine.

But it's OK to lease his land to a company that will put up multiple wind turbines and turn his property into a wind farm. And they'll pay him five figures a year to do it.

That's just one of many contradictions emerging as wind project proposals multiply like rabbits across Ontario -- hundreds, totalling more than 3,000 turbines and counting, several of them on the moraine. (Only 10 major sites are running so far.)

Here's another: In the same week that Premier Dalton McGuinty rolled out his green energy strategy, one group of



**CONNIE
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Out There

Northumberland residents jammed a hall to protest the moraine wind farm while another celebrated the arrival of a new factory -- to build wind turbines.

And all over Ontario, wherever similar events are taking place, lots of people who consider themselves green energy fans are beginning to have doubts.

Every time there's a public meeting to discuss a project, crowds gather with questions: How far should they be from homes? Are there health effects? Do they produce

enough energy? How much noise should they be allowed to create? And what happens if they're not sustainable? Do we have rusting hulks dotting the landscape? (The recent unveiling of a solar energy project the size of nine Rogers Centres near Napanee to provide electricity for a mere 1,000 households did nothing to ease fears.)

Prime targets

Central Ontario is one of several prime targets. Others include Lake Erie and the Owen Sound area. At one public meeting in my area, 150 people turned out in a village with a population of half that. In Prince Edward County, another attracted more than 300. And in the City of Kawartha Lakes, a crowd of 500 got so worked up

that fist fights broke out.

"It looked," says one observer, "like the wild west."

And at every meeting, people already coping with wind turbines point out the problems: Nobody really knows about health problems or what proper setbacks should be. And it seems to take a whole herd of them to produce a significant amount of energy.

But McGuinty has made it clear there'll be few obstacles in the paths of the companies rushing to install them. No NIMBYism allowed, he's said. A *London Free Press* report recently revealed 31 projects in the last four years have gone ahead with no provincial environmental assessment.

Funny thing, but the more environmental activists I meet, the more doubts I hear.

These are people who originally saw wind turbines as the answer to everything -- free, clean and everywhere. As one woman told me, much as she loves green energy, "those structures are completely inappropriate" on the Oak Ridges Moraine. Substitute Lake Erie, Georgian Bay or Lake Ontario for the moraine and you've got the views of many others.

Protest group

Gwyer Moore, of Grafton, east of Cobourg, knew nothing about turbines until Energy Farming Ontario decided to put some near him. He knows you can't stop these projects, but he hopes to talk neighbours out of hosting them and convince the province it should rethink some of its regulations. So he helped

form a protest group, one of the 33 in Ontario so far.

Conservative MPP Bill Murdoch of Owen Sound, where towers are proliferating, will ask the province to declare a moratorium until the potential health problems are investigated. But don't count on it actually happening. A spokesman for Energy Minister George Smitherman has already said green energy is too big a part of the green energy strategy.

I still remember my first glimpse of a wind farm nearly a decade ago. The towers seemed massive, otherworldly, majestic -- and a hope for the future.

Now? In Dalton McGuinty's Ontario, all I expect is a bigger hydro bill.

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