

# EDITORIALS & LETTERS

## Opinions differ regarding “Wind Energy” in the Back Country

### Harnessing wind energy will preserve our rural way of life

By RANDY LENAC

Recent articles by rural activists have suggested that developing wind energy in East San Diego County would harm our rural way of life. I believe the opposite is true. We must pursue clean, renewable wind energy projects in order to preserve our way of life.

Harnessing the power of wind is not a new concept. Once upon a time, windmills on individual farms and ranches were common, especially before the invention of the power grid, which spread electricity to rural areas far and wide. Modern-day wind projects are actually a reflection of the past and can be used to sustain rural communities and family ranches that are otherwise in danger of becoming extinct.

Wind can help our rural economy thrive during a time when things have become more than difficult. East San Diego County has been harder hit than most other areas by the recession, especially in agriculture and ranching. Very few rural families can live off the income of the family farm or ranch. Dry conditions and the uncertainty of irrigation water availability have reduced crop yields. Foreclosure rates on farms are up.

But a 2004 study by the U.S. Department of Energy's Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy found that during the next 20 years, renewable energy projects can create \$60 billion in capital investment in rural America, provide \$1.2 billion in new income for farmers and rural landowners, and create 80,000 new jobs.

Closer to home, the numbers get even better. The Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative, the collective effort of some of the state's foremost

energy experts, recently determined that there is the potential to generate nearly 3,500 megawatts of clean energy from the wind just in East San Diego County and the adjacent Baja region. If even half of that energy was harnessed, it could power more than 1 million homes with zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Using a model created by the CALPIRG Charitable Trust, which studied renewable energy potential in California, that would translate to roughly 14,000 year-long construction jobs and 1,500 permanent operations and maintenance jobs. Over thirty years of operation, these new plants would create 60,000 person-years of employment.

Who among us would say that East San Diego County doesn't need more jobs? More jobs mean fewer people leaving our area to find employment elsewhere, which means we can more easily sustain ourselves and our communities.

But what about the so-called “industrialization” of the back country that some activists complain about? That's a smokescreen. As I said earlier, windmills have been part of the rural landscape for generations. Without them, the establishment of our early agricultural industries would not have been possible. And whether wind turbines represent a blight on our landscape is purely a matter of opinion, and not a widely held one, either, if you look at the facts of a recent study by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory.

The report found no “widespread, statistically observable” impact of wind turbines on the sale of homes in the United States. The study examined 50 statistical model specifications, including the view of wind turbines and the distance of homes to turbines. Researchers

also compared homes that sold before and after the announcement or construction of a wind farm. None of the factors was found to have a measurable effect on the selling prices of the homes. The study collected data from 7,500 sales of single-family homes within 10 miles of 24 existing wind power facilities in nine states between 1996 and 2007.

Economics aside, the environmental benefits of wind energy cannot be ignored. The more wind farms we build, the less we rely on fossil fuels to power our way of life, and the more energy-independent we become. The less we have to send our young to foreign lands to defend access to oil supplies and the more we can keep our energy-dollars in our Country and our community. We have got to find a way to stop funding the very enemies who would seek to destroy our way of life with more and more of our energy-dollars. One 750-kilowatt wind turbine, which is typically being installed around the world today, produces approximately 2 million kilowatt-hours of power each year and zero carbon dioxide emissions. Generating that much energy by burning fossil fuels would create 1,500 tons of carbon dioxide each year.

Let's face it. Living in isolated rural communities is a lifestyle choice. Ranching in those communities is another choice many of us make. It has never been an easy way to make a living, but wind energy is the cash crop of the future. It's a practical way to ease the financial burdens on ranchers and rural communities and preserve our rural way of life at a time when it has never faced more serious threats. In other words, if our land is no longer worth what it once was, the air above it is now worth a lot more.

### Wind energy not clean - can start fires - not win-win for back country

Letter to the Editor

This is in response to Randy Lenac's previous two opinion pieces printed in the Messenger: “The ECO Substation Requires leadership to be built” and “Clean energy potential needs to be tapped.”

The ECO Substation piece oddly started off with our military making sacrifices to protect oil reserves. Lenac wrongly purports that the ECO Substation will somehow change this scenario and make us a more secure nation with more reliable and affordable energy. In the clean energy piece he unabashedly promotes several industrial wind energy projects in Boulevard and the related new transmission lines and substations in Jacumba and Boulevard as being safe, environmentally friendly, affordable, and an improvement to our quality of life. Again, he is wrong.

Industrial wind turbines and new transmission infrastructure represent significant new ignition sources for wildfires. In the Tule Wind MUP process, the County states the project represents a major wildfire threat. Turbines also emit infrasonic vibrations and thumping noises that represent negative impacts to the health of humans and wildlife. Turbines also attract lightning, like the December 7th storm that struck the Kumeyaay Wind facility. It has been out of commission since. If the storm had been a dry lightning storm, a wildfire could have been ignited. Turbines can also malfunction and burst into flame or throw blades great distances. New independent reports show that property values are negatively impacted by the presence of industrial wind turbines—in contradiction to what wind proponents claim.

If Lenac is not on the payroll of Sempra, SDG&E, Invenery and /or Iberdrola Renewables, he should be.

He seems to be running around promoting their projects ad nauseam. There must be a reason. He has not impressed me as being overly environmentally aware. It is my opinion that faux community leaders like Lenac ingratiate themselves with the developers and for-profit corporations that want to industrialize and scar our scenic rural communities in order to promote their own dreams of grandeur and inappropriate rural development. He is obviously not thinking about what is best for the impacted communities or property owners. These developers love to find a local face, like Lenac, to promote their projects as win-win for the locals. In reality, these projects often negatively impact local communities, their quality of life, and property values, while providing a good return to their executives and shareholders who live elsewhere. Just visualize a wolf in sheep's clothing.

We do not need the Sunrise Powering, SDG&E's ECO Substation, Sempra's cross-border Energia Sierra Juarez, Iberdrola's Tule Wind or SDG&E & Invenery's new Campo wind project to provide renewable energy for San Diego and Los Angeles (you know it's not for us). The PUC's assigned Administrative Law Judge for the Sunrise Powerlink, who sat through all the testimony and read all the documents, determined that Sunrise (and all the connected remote projects) were not needed and there are better, cheaper, and less environmentally destructive ways to generate renewable energy at or near the point of use. Even the USEPA now states that retail and wholesale urban solar photovoltaic projects on existing buildings, parking lots and already disturbed lands, should be considered as viable alternatives to remote renewable energy projects that require extensive,

expensive and destructive new transmission lines. The ever dropping prices make them cost competitive.

The Sunrise Powerlink is the subject of legal challenges at the state and federal level. I am one of the plaintiffs and know that our federal case is very strong. SDG&E is getting nervous for very good reasons and have been advertising like crazy. Why would a monopoly need to advertise? They have launched the massive campaign because they are trying to convince folks that Sunrise Powerlink, the ECO Substation, and all the other unnecessary projects are done deals. They are not done deals. Don't buy into the hype and misinformation campaign. Get involved!

I strongly encourage Lenac and others to look deeper into the background of these large corporations and their unnecessary projects. If SDG&E and other Investor Owned Utilities would quit opposing Feed in Tariffs and distributed generation, and if federal and state taxpayer funded subsidies were provided to individual property and business owners, local schools, and churches, instead of going to multi-national corporations (including big oil companies) then we could all install solar panels, generate our own power and sell the excess energy back to the grid. This scenario would also provide for a more diverse and reliable system less vulnerable to attack or wildfires. It would also provide more long-term local jobs, real local economic development, and an incentive for folks to weatherize their homes and conserve energy so they would have more to sell back to the utilities. In my opinion, this would be the real win-win situation.

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