

Permit for VA's First Renewable Project Final

Appeal Deadline Passes Without Challenge, Highland Wind to Begin Construction Soon

RICHMOND – The recent permit for Virginia's first renewable wind project located in Highland County was finalized today as the 30-day deadline for appeal to Commonwealth's Supreme Court of Appeals expired.

On December 20th, the State Corporation Commission (SCC) awarded Highland New Wind Development, LLC approval for the \$60 million project, which is expected to provide as much as \$200,000 per year in tax revenue for the County. The project will consist of a substation and 19 wind turbines on more than 200 acres, producing 39 megawatts of renewable electricity. In 2005, the Highland County Board of Supervisors approved a Conditional Use Permit for a new wind farm located in western Highland County, Virginia, bordering West Virginia.

"Renewable power from wind is creating a great opportunity for Highland County and all of Virginia," said landowner and Highland New Wind Development Manager Henry T. McBride. "This project sets in motion a new era of renewable energy for the state of Virginia. I am proud that McBride family land will provide revenue for Highland County, a leadership role promoting renewable energy in Virginia and reducing global warming for our environment."

Developer, Mac McBride, from Harrisonburg was elated to have this last significant milestone accomplished. With this approval, the next step will be HNWD to identify financial investors, a process that could be completed during the first quarter of next year, as well as procure the necessary building permits to begin construction. The wind farm could be operational as early as late this year -- 2008.

It was widely expected that opponents of the project were going to appeal the SCC decision, which could have caused additional delays of at least a year. But the SCC's thoroughness and an earlier Supreme Court decision which denied opponents' lawsuits against Highland County officials perhaps weighed on the decision.

The permit adopts many of the previous findings of the Hearing Examiner Alexander Skirpan in his report to the Commission. Conditions include aggressive post-construction wildlife monitoring capped at specific levels.

Virginia energy, health and environmental experts praised the project and the SCC permit for its wildlife protections.

"With the wildlife protections built into this permit, our Highland County project will lead the way as 'greenest' wind farm in the world, " said Highland County Board Supervisor Jerry Rexrode. "Not only will this help our County will important revenues, but it will show companies and communities that the Commonwealth's road to a cleaner energy future runs right through Highland County."

It is essential to air quality that Virginia push forward with projects like this," said Frank O'Donnell, Clean Air Watch. "This is a major step forward for clean, renewable energy in Virginia that will allow residents of the Commonwealth to breathe easier."

"This is a major step in the fight to slow the effects of global warming," said Chesapeake Climate Action Network campaigner Diana Dascalu-Joffe. "With the devastating impacts unchecked global warming will place of our region, it is only through the leadership of projects like Highland Wind that we will be putting our clean energy words into action."

"People around the Commonwealth are very interested in getting homegrown, renewable power from Virginia to operate their businesses and communities," said Mitch King, President of Old Mill Power, a company that sells renewable power to interested parties. "The Highland project will not only benefit the environment, it will finally meet the demands of many of our customers in Virginia."