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## Taxing turbines

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*Wruble: 'The idea has some merit'*

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**UBLY** — The Huron County Board of Commissioners chairman on Monday resurrected an idea proposed last spring in efforts to offset the county millage by capturing some revenue from the energy produced by wind turbines.

"The idea has some merit," said Ron Wruble at the Michigan Association of Counties (MAC) District 7 meeting Monday at Ubyly Heights.

Wruble proposed the possibility of pursuing a per-kilowatt charge on wind turbines erected in the county in April 2008.

"We want to poise ourselves in a position where we can capture some of these royalties/revenue for the citizens of Huron County," Wruble said at an April 15, 2008 commissioners meeting.

Just as he did when he originally proposed the idea last year, Wruble said the area's wind is a natural resource, and compared it to that of petroleum in Alaska. Looking at it as such, he said it would make sense for the area to capture some of the revenue generated by the area's wind to offset taxes and/or pay residents royalties, as is done in Alaska.

"We have the natural resource, we should benefit from it," he said.

However, when Wruble proposed the idea last year, he said he received some communications from Gov. Jennifer Granholm's office, which was extremely opposed to his idea.

But, Wruble indicated in the report presented during Monday's MAC District 7 meeting—which was unveiled during last week's board of commissioners meeting — the idea has some value.

Those at Monday's meeting heard a history of how the two area wind projects have progressed, and how the county's zoning has been crafted to allow wind turbines in areas used for agriculture.

The goal of the county's wind ordinance overlay is to preserve the areas with the best soil for farming, and encourage turbine developments at sites that are ideal for farming, said Huron County Building and Zoning Director Russ Lundberg. That way, the land is preserved for agricultural use.

Lundberg said turbines are sited at the edge of fields or along county drains so as to not interfere with farming. He said while there are some issues that currently are being addressed, including those raised by residents regarding setback issues. These issues have involved complaints from residents in at least five homes near Michigan Wind 1 in Ubley. They've complained of noise problems being caused by the park.

A subcommittee has been formed and will meet to address the issue further, Lundberg told those at Monday's meeting.

Also at Monday's meeting, there was an outline of the tax revenue the two area parks are expected to produce. In the course of 15 years, it is estimated the two parks will generate a total of \$11.3 to \$11.4 million in tax revenue to local and county government, as well as other local entities such as a library and two local school districts.

Regarding other ways the two parks have impacted the local economy, Carl Osentoski, Huron County Economic Development Corporation executive director, said it's estimated the construction of the parks resulted in a \$30 million impact to local communities.

He said property owners who have turbines on their land, or who have signed easements, have benefited through sign-up payments that, combined, totaled about \$200,000 or more. Also, he said landowners with turbines receive roughly \$3,000 to \$4,000 per turbine per quarter.

That money, Osentoski said, trickles back into the local economy.

Other economic benefits have been through job creation, though the number of jobs created by the parks are not near what county officials previously assumed. However, Osentoski said, he and Michigan Works! officials are coordinating a training effort to help local contractors secure jobs in future wind park constructions, as well as jobs required to service wind turbines once a park has been constructed and the manufacturer's warranty expires.

Those at Monday's meeting included commissioners and other officials from MAC District 7, which includes Huron, Tuscola, Sanilac, Lapeer and St. Clair counties. Officials from Clinton County also were at the meeting to hear Huron County's report about the impacts of the two area wind projects.

Following the presentation, the group went for a tour of Michigan Wind 1 near Ubly.

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