

# Great turbine debate



## *State wind board meeting packed*

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**BAD AXE** — There were a flurry of opinions either in favor or opposed to the Thumb becoming a designated wind energy resource zone given Monday during the first of two public hearings that will be held in the state this month.

There was standing room only at Monday's meeting, which was held at the Expo Center in Bad Axe. The meeting is part of an effort to receive comment from four regions in the state identified as having the highest level of wind energy harvest potential in a June 2 proposed report by the Wind Energy Resource Zone Board.

The Wind Energy Resource Zone Board is an 11-member board appointed Dec. 4, 2008 by the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC), per Public Act 295, which is known as the Clean, Renewable and Efficient Energy Act.

Board members were appointed by the MPSC, and represent one of the following organizations or interest groups as set forth in PA 295: cities and villages; townships; Michigan Office of the Attorney General; MPSC; renewable energy industry; electric utility industry (two members); independent transmission companies; environmental organizations; alternative energy suppliers; and public at large.

Board Chairman David Walters — who is the general manager at Zeeland Board of Public Works and was appointed to the state's wind board as an electric utility industry representative — explained Monday's public hearing in Bad Axe precludes another scheduled for 11 a.m. Monday Aug. 31 at West Shore Community College in Scottville.

Comments given during the two meetings will be taken into consideration by the board while drafting a final report, Walters said. He noted the public also can submit comments on the proposed report, which is available to view online at [www.michigan.gov/windboard](http://www.michigan.gov/windboard), through Sept. 8. Anyone who wishes to submit comments online may do so at <https://janus.pscinc.com/windenergyresourcezone>.

Those who do not wish to submit a comment online may mail their thoughts and concerns to the board through Board Secretary Julie Baldwin, Michigan Public Service Commission, P.O. Box 30221, Lansing, MI 48909.

The board is required to have its final report issued within 45 days after the Aug. 31 public hearing. Within 45 days after the final report is issued, transmission companies and electric utilities will identify for planning purposes the electric transmission facilities needed to deliver the estimated minimum and maximum wind energy potential from each of the four regions identified as having the most wind energy potential.

The MPSC then will consider the information compiled by the transmission companies and electric utilities, along with the findings in the wind resource zone board's final report, before designating one or more areas as a wind energy resource zone.

Areas named as having the highest level of wind energy harvest potential in the June 2 proposed report included portions of Allegan County; portions of Antrim and Charlevoix counties; portions of Benzie, Leelanau and Manistee counties; and the Thumb region, particularly all of Huron County, as well as portions of Bay, Saginaw, Sanilac and Tuscola Counties.

The proposed report identifies Huron County as having by far the largest amount of wind energy production potential. The report estimates the Thumb has the potential to have between 1,578 and 2,824 turbines, a capacity of between 2,367 and 4,236 megawatts and an annual energy production of between more than 6.7 million and 12 million megawatt hours.

Speakers during Monday's public hearing noted the state's transition to increased wind energy development in Michigan will depend on a number of factors, such as state and federal policies and incentives, community acceptance, wind resources, land availability and economic considerations. Another factor that might affect the scope and pace of wind energy development will be the ability of the electric transmission system to support the delivery of such power to customers.

Both Walters and MPSC Spokeswoman Judy Palnau stressed that just because four regions have been preliminary identified as having the most wind potential, it does not mean wind development will occur in these regions.

"In fact, the board is aware that there are utility scale wind projects currently being considered for development outside these regions," Walter noted in a statement issued at Monday's meeting. "In addition, local governments retain their zoning rights or ability to review and authorize siting of wind farms in their communities."

Local zoning was one of the issues brought up more than once during Monday's public hearing, as were concerns about the public health, safety and welfare.

The following is a look at some of the comments, which were limited to three minutes each, from those in attendance. During the public comment period, an informal show of hands was taken of individuals either for or against more wind development in the Thumb. Of the hands raised, the majority were opposed to additional development, by a margin of roughly 60 to 40 percent.

### **Pros: Bring on the future**

Lake Township resident Yvonne Bushey, the first person to give input during Monday's hearing, said she represents a large family that wants to see clean, renewable energy in Michigan. Her family, which farms, also wants to see more turbines in the agricultural areas in the county because they help preserve the area's farmland by discouraging other land uses — including residential sprawl — from cropping up in agricultural areas.

Putting wind turbines in agricultural areas also creates an additional benefit from the existing farm land, making it more productive, Bushey said.

Bushey said additional wind development also would benefit the local economy — from the local school system to the county and township governmental entities. Also, landowners with turbines on their property would receive additional income, which would be spent at area businesses.

Jeanette Hagen — who worked for Noble Environmental Power, LLC to help develop what is now the Michigan Wind 1 development, and currently works for John Deere Wind Energy, which owns the Ubly area wind farm, as well as Harvest Wind Farm near Elkton — said she also is a land owner and has turbines on her property. One turbine's sited less than 1,000 feet away from her home, and another is as far as 2,000 feet away. She said her office is located within 100 feet of wind turbines, and since the project went online in December 2008, neither she nor anyone else in her family have experienced problems from the turbines. Also, she added, none of the landowners participating in the development have filed any complaints about the project.

She said John Deere has received nine official complaints from residents living near Michigan Wind 1, and the company is working on addressing those problems.

As for the other benefits the park has created, Hagen said it's brought ecotourism in the area, as many individuals have visited the area to go on tours of the wind farm. Also, she said local companies maintain and supply the Michigan Wind 1 office on Atwater Road outside of Ubly. She said while the wind park does not have as many employees as a factory does, the amount of money given in easement payments to participating landowners every quarter amounts to approximately 30 factory jobs.

Also, taxpayers benefit through decreased millage rates as the wind parks have contributed increased tax revenues to the local townships.

"Our way of life is changing because the world is changing," Hagen said.

### **Cons: Not by my home**

Many of those in attendance who were opposed to having the Thumb named a wind energy resource zone said they were not anti-wind energy. Rather, many felt renewable energy is a good and necessary thing. However, many felt the turbines should be sited in an area that won't interfere with anyone's home or way of life.

"There are other areas better suited than others ... areas away from people," said Lake Township resident Charles Henry, noting concerns expressed from residents

who live near Michigan Wind 1 are a prime example of what the wind board needs to consider in its final report.

"Please do not exclude their complaints — they're real," he said.

Marilyn Peplinski was one of five residents who have filed official complaints stating Michigan Wind 1 is negatively affecting their life who gave comment during Monday's public hearing.

She said her family's experience living roughly 1,300 feet away from a wind turbine has been a nightmare, as it's affected their sleep. Peplinski said as the school year approaches, the family has an apartment to rent so their children will be able to sleep at night.

"They're (the turbines) are essentially chasing us from our home," she said, noting low frequency noise problems have made her family members feel a panicky sensation.

Peplinski noted she feels the county's wind ordinance is too lenient, turning a blind eye to World Health Organization guidelines.

"We don't want what's happening to our family to happen to yours," she said.

Ubley resident Angela Weber agreed.

"We can feel the change in our family. There have been disturbances and you can't do anything about it," she said, noting there has to be a balance between preserving agricultural land and protecting families/homes that already exist.

Weber added her family doesn't have the option of packing up and leaving, as their entire life's investment is in their home and property.

Thomas Peruski, who lives about a half mile away from Ubley, said he has four turbines surrounding his property, and on some days, the noise is very profound and he hasn't been able to do anything about it.

He said \$45,000 in revenue to schools is "a kick in the pants" to what he's been experiencing. He noted tax revenue eventually will decrease if no one wants to live near the turbines.

Eugene Champagne said he's lived with three wind turbines roughly 1,400 feet away from his home at the Harvest Wind Farm near Elkton, and he has experienced problems, as well. He noted the problems include shadow flicker and interference with his TV signal. While John Deere corrected the TV interference problems with a verbal agreement, no written agreement has been made.

Champagne said his experience, in addition to the ones reported at Michigan Wind I, show turbines are being placed too close to homes in Huron County.

Lake Township Planning Board member Tim Lalley said increased setbacks from homes will reduce the number of turbines a developer can site in Huron County, which he believes will reduce the developer's profit. However, he said, it also will

reduce the likelihood of a resident being adversely affected by turbines, and it's the charge of government to protect the public's health, safety and welfare.

Clay Kelterborn, former Lake Township Supervisor, said he was at Monday's hearing to speak on behalf of a lot of property owners who have requested Lake Township be excluded from a wind energy resource zone. He said the reason for that is because Lake Township is a shoreline community; includes a state game area used by migratory birds; is bordered by the Pigeon and Pinnebog rivers; and relies on a tourist economy, which he fears would be hurt by this sort of industrial development.

Lake Township Clerk Valerie McCallum said she feels local commercial scale wind development is not possible without jeopardizing the health, safety and welfare of the public.

Lake Township resident Jeannie Henry said she felt many residents who have been expressing concerns have been brushed off over the past few years as the county and local townships have tackled the process of creating zoning ordinances to allow for wind development in Huron County. Now local officials are trying to come to grasps in terms of how to deal with the problems some residents living near turbines are experiencing, wind developers are being steamrolled into the Thumb, she said.

Jeannie Henry conceded that the idea of seeing thousands of turbines in the Thumb more than likely will attract tourists as future developments are created.

"But so do freak shows," she added.

### **Other comments**

Sand Point resident Lowell Kraft said he enjoys the area's wind, and would like to see turbines constructed on Saginaw Bay, out of viewing and hearing range where they won't interfere with anyone's way of life.

Huron County Commissioner John Horny said he'd like the board to consider allowing a residential turbine — that does not exceed 40 feet in height — on every property in Huron County, rather than having a handful of commercial-sized developments that include tower heights of 400 feet.

"They are noiseless," he said in regard to residential turbines.

An Ann Arbor resident asked those in the audience from the Thumb area to consider the benefits of alternative energy. He noted other forms of energy have negative effects in other areas, and the Thumb benefits from that power.

Harrison Township Supervisor Anthony G. Forlini said he came to Monday's meeting to ask the wind board to consider including Harrison Township in a wind energy resource zone. He noted his township is very interested in having one or two turbines near Lake St. Clair, noting it could be a great local ecotourism attraction and provide increased revenue for the area.