

Top of the World: 110 Turbines



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Reporter/Photographer

An Industrial Development Permit and Siting Act application filed Sept. 21 offers some of the most detailed information yet provided about North Carolina-based Duke Energy's plans for construction of the new Top of The World wind farm near Rolling Hills.

Duke currently plans to erect 110 turbines, according to the lengthy application, which is available for public inspection at the Converse County Libraries. Duke plans to use 66 General Electric 1.5 megawatt turbines (similar to the 389-foot tall turbines used by Rocky Mountain Power's wind farms near Rolling Hills) and 44 Siemens SWT-2.3-101 turbines. The Siemens turbines will stand about 428 feet high (from the ground to the tip of their blade) and generate 2.3 megawatts each, according to the application.

In addition to the turbines, Duke also plans to construct approximately 33 miles of new gravel roads, a two acre substation, an "operation and maintenance" building, two water wells, two 262 foot high meteorological towers and six miles of 230kv transmission lines (connecting the project site with the Windstar substation near the Dave Johnston Power Plant).

The wind farm's 18,089- acre proposed project area lies on leased private and state lands about four miles northeast of Glenrock, according to the application, and a map included with the document highlights an area just east of Rolling Hills. Duke had originally hoped to construct turbines within a mile of residences in Rolling Hills but, after listening to comments made at a series of public meetings held to discuss the project, the company decided to move the planned locations of the closest turbines to sites further northeast of the two communities.

"We did that based on feedback we'd received from the community," Duke Energy spokesman Greg Efthimiou explained. "We're constantly compiling feedback from the community and, in this case, there was a workaround that we could put in place that was good for the company's potential plans for the project as well as the landowners in the area."

Maps provided with Duke's application now appear to place the closest planned turbine location more than two miles northeast of Rolling Hills.

Duke has slated road and transmission line construction to begin in November and December 2009 and hopes to proceed with "formal commencement of project construction" in the first quarter of 2010. Wyoming's Industrial Siting Council (ISC) has scheduled a hearing on the permit application Dec. 2 at 8:30 a.m. in Douglas' Best Western Inn and the application has stated that the company hopes to obtain all necessary permits by December.

Top of the World's construction workforce will range in size from a low of 35 workers in November 2009 to a high of 374 during the construction's peak in the summer of 2010, according to estimates found within Duke's application. Similar estimates predict that the construction will employ an average of 24 locals at any given time during a 14-month period. Sixteen to 17 full-time employees will be required during the wind farm's first two years of operation and the site will employ 14 workers in the following years of operation.

Workforce and delivery vehicles bound for the project will most likely travel along I-25, WYO 95, WYO 93 and U.S. 20-26, according to the application. Duke will also request that all construction and delivery trucks accessing the project site do not use exit 165 near Glenrock and plans to coordinate some deliveries with the Wyoming Department of Transportation and local school districts.

The application documents also state that, upon termination of the project's leases, Duke is "contractually obligated" to abide by decommissioning plans included in each agreement.

Duke anticipates that the project's turbines will become operational by the end of December 2010.

Members of the public wishing to comment on Duke's Industrial Development Permit and Siting Act application should write to Tom Schroeder at the Wyoming Department of Environmental Quality by Oct. 21.

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