

Editorial: New MAREC project will clear up wind questions

By Muskegon Chronicle

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At long last, West Michigan will find out just exactly how much wind is off its shores.

Grand Valley State University's Michigan Alternative and Renewable Energy Center in Muskegon recently learned it will receive a \$1.3 million state grant to help fund a several-year study of offshore winds.

MAREC already has been awarded a \$1.4 million federal grant for the project. The center also will seek private-equity partners to fund the final 30 percent of the project. Hopefully, there are many partners out there willing to fund collection of hard data.

Researchers from MAREC, in partnership with the University of Michigan Memorial Phoenix Energy Institute, plan to conduct studies exploring the feasibility of offshore wind turbines on Lake Michigan. They propose to build a first-of-its-kind, floating data-collection platform in Lake Michigan. The idea is to collect year-round wind data for two or three years. The study will provide an excellent source of unbiased information for the ongoing debate in West Michigan.

Michigan's entire west coast has been listed by the U.S. Department of Energy as in the excellent to outstanding wind-power classification. It has been claimed that the area near Pentwater, which is being proposed as the site of the state's first offshore wind farm, has some of the best wind in the nation.

The MAREC project is important because of the specific data that will be gathered by an organization that is not in the business of generating power. Scandia Wind, which is proposing a 200-turbine wind farm over 100 square miles of Lake Michigan near Pentwater, also is considering a feasibility study.

It's clear a wind farm is in West Michigan's future. Two other wind projects also have been proposed. Consumers Energy recently announced a 70-turbine project near its Ludington Pump Storage plant and BP Energy is seeking property easements on land north of Ludington in the Huron-Manistee National Forest. BP Energy is proposing 20 to 28, 420-foot-tall turbines.

The MAREC information also will dovetail with another project already under way by GVSU researchers. A \$139,912 grant from the Michigan Sea Grant program is funding a two-year study on how utility wind farms could affect West Michigan's shoreline communities.

That team is looking specifically at the advantages and disadvantages of wind power generating facilities in Muskegon, Ottawa and Allegan counties. It is studying environmental, social, economic, aesthetic and policy concerns of land-based and

offshore turbines.

The group has promised to release results in specific areas as it completes its studies so that West Michigan communities will be able to benefit from their work before the final report is completed. Many communities are discussing zoning ordinances for various types of wind turbines.

MAREC also should release information on its data on a regular basis so local officials can have some idea of the feasibility of projects that are being placed before them before they make zoning changes.

It's important for West Michigan to have a part in the researching as well as the establishment of wind energy generating plants. It's important to have people familiar with the lake and the weather asking informed questions.

It assures residents that the data is solid and not something massaged to fit the need.

It won't be a series of answers blowing in the wind.

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