

Editorial: Wind power is economic power

By [The Grand Rapids Press Editorial Board](#)

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The view from the shores of Lake Michigan includes more than fresh-water vistas and picturesque sunsets. Possibility is on the horizon, if we have the right vision.

One project in sight is offshore wind farms. Putting windmills in the big lakes would reduce the state's dependence on coal power, create jobs and return life to dead factories and sleepy harbors. The state is behind on this project, as detailed last week in the third installment of Michigan 10.0, The Press' project exploring big questions facing Michigan.

At issue: striking the right balance between the use and the protection of natural resources. Michigan is defined, figuratively and geographically, by the Great Lakes. Within those contours are some of the most spectacular dunes, forests and inland waters anywhere in the world.

Not to mention some of the best winds. Michigan has been identified as a state with promising breezes, just right for energy-generating turbines. Some of the windiest locations hug the state's western shore, in the waters of Lake Michigan.

Other countries are aggressively moving ahead with harvesting the wind on water. Some states in this country, mostly along the Eastern shore, have begun to move in that direction as well. But Michigan lacks regulations to bring order, reason and consistency to the placement of offshore wind farms.

Delay means missing a big opportunity. Pent-up manufacturing potential, idled in the contraction of the auto industry, is waiting to be remobilized and put to new purpose. Making windmill parts needs to be done relatively close to where turbines are built. Giant blades can't be moved over long distances. Local harbors would play a key role here.

The bottom-lands of big portions of the Great Lakes are owned by the people of Michigan. Therefore, regulation of potential wind farms has to be done at the state level. Lakeside dwellers will have a big voice in proposed projects, and should. But it's important to note their interests are not, by law, greater than anyone else's. The lands under consideration are state owned and should be state regulated.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm last year created a Great Lakes Wind Council that has suggested legal standards for offshore wind development. Writing new laws from these recommendations is urgent work. The goal should be regulations that are flexible enough that they are inviting to potential developers. In addition, laws should be consistent with

federal standards so companies aren't forced to jump through different sets of regulatory hoops.

Ontario has an aggressive strategy for developing wind farms in the Great Lakes. One project there promises an \$83 billion investment and more than 66,000 jobs. The more Michigan dawdles, the more it lets similar opportunities blow past. Completely off target in this regard is legislation in Lansing that would place a moratorium on offshore wind development. That bill says to companies: Create jobs elsewhere.

Interested parties are already knocking. Scandia Wind Offshore of Norway is proposing a \$4 billion regional project that would build wind farms off the coasts of Pentwater and Grand Haven, as well as on shore in Muskegon County. Developers say 3,000 jobs could come to West Michigan as a result.

Wind energy development dovetails with state laws mandating a growing percentage of power from renewable sources. Wind has the potential to fill a large part of that mandate. Besides creating jobs, wind farms would decrease the need for power from coal, a major source of mercury and other harmful pollutants.

Proposals such as Scandia's will meet initial resistance. Some concerns are legitimate — for instance, the effect a big wind farm would have on fish, birds and bats. Others focus on aesthetics and raise less credible concerns that wind farms would hurt tourism. All of these issues need to be fully discussed and explored before windmills are allowed in the lake.

But on the whole, Michigan should encourage wind farm development, and find a sensible regulatory structure to make it happen.

Wind power is economic power. That's not just hot air.