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Planned wind farm a boost for economy

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A wind farm planned near Petersburg, Neb., will add jobs and help diversify the economy, project backers said Thursday after the Omaha Public Power District agreed to buy the electricity that the development's 27 turbines will create.

"We are very excited about the opportunity to partner with OPPD, Third Planet Windpower and the community," Ross Knott, president and CEO of Petersburg State Bank, told the utility's board as it approved an agreement to buy the project's 40.5 megawatts of electricity.

Erecting the turbines, which will each produce 1.5 megawatts of power, will require about 150 workers at the peak construction period and nearly a dozen full-time employees after completion, officials said.

Output from wind farms varies depending on weather conditions, but on average the turbines in the Boone County operation are expected to produce enough electricity to power about 12,000 homes a year.

The wind farm should be operating by the third quarter of 2011. OPPD will buy the electricity for 20 years, with an option to buy the wind farm after those 20 years.

The operation will be located near turbines expected to produce 80 megawatts of electricity for the Nebraska Public Power District. That wind farm is being developed by Midwest Wind Energy/Edison Mission Midwest.

The two projects together mean a lot for Boone County, said Shannon Landauer, executive director of the Boone County Development Agency. About 388 people live in Petersburg, and about 5,500 live in the county, she said.

Boone County Commissioner Hank Thieman said the deal demonstrates that rural Nebraska and the Omaha area can work together, despite a perception among many that the city pulls young people away from smaller communities.

"We do get something in return," Thieman said. "This proves we can be partners."

Knott, the banker, attended Thursday's board meeting along with several other Boone County residents to show support for the project.

Consolidation of farming operations and the capital that young people need to get into production agriculture have hurt the Petersburg area, Knott said. The wind farm will bring needed economic diversification, he said.

Larry Temme, who owns grocery stores in Petersburg and Lindsay, said wind farm workers will help his business. Temme also owns property on which about three turbines will be placed, which will produce at least \$8,000 per tower annually in lease payments while allowing the land to continue as farmland.

Similar payments will be given to other landowners as well, Temme said.

"Over 20 years it adds up," he said.

Third Planet Windpower LLC, based in Incline Village, Nev., will develop the wind farm for OPPD, and a subsidiary of Third Planet, TWP Petersburg LLC, will generate the power.

The wind farm will be a Community-Based Energy Development, or C-BED project, which requires that 33 percent of the revenues from its operation go to Nebraska residents who have invested in the project.

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