

Aboriginal Ontario

Open for Business

A Special Report on Economic Development



Economic prosperity could be blowin' in the wind

PART ONE OF A SERIES

By Jennifer Ashawasegai

PARRY SOUND – Imagine seeing wind turbines dotting the horizon on First Nations lands and territories. There are high hopes that harnessing naturally-occurring winds can help build economies that communities so badly need to escape poverty.

Wind-farm developers have been knocking on First Nation doors and wooing their potential business partners with promises of revenues and job creation. The proposals tout environmentally-friendly philosophies, making them even more enticing to First Nations, who control what the developers want -- land.

The wind development market has been exploding onto Canada's energy industry scene for the past nine years. According to Canada's Wind Energy Association (CANWEA), between the years 2000 and 2006, the market has seen an average annual growth rate of 51 per cent, and will continue growing to match provincial and federal targets to increase renewable energy sources to feed existing power grids.

Recent court decisions and Ontario's Green Energy Act make it clear that First Nations must be consulted about proposed developments taking place on their traditional lands. The Act includes a "duty to consult" clause, to be interpreted like Section 35 of the Constitution Act, and includes other stipulations to ensure First Nation participation in the green energy industry.

Numerous wind projects are on the go involving First Nations in Ontario, including at least three in Anishinabek Nation territory.

Wasauksing First Nation is continuing negotiations with Skypower, a company that currently has over 200 projects at various stages of development in North America.

Wasauksing First Nation Chief



Henvey Inlet First Nation surveyed all its citizens about possible windpower project with this postcard.

Shane Tabobondung says there are six test towers up around Parry Island in Georgian Bay, near Parry Sound. He says the first one was erected in 2004, and soon after the community posted its wind data a year and a half later six developers were knocking on the door to do business.

Wasauksing decided to partner up with Skypower.

The First Nation has applied to the Ontario Power Authority's Request for Proposals but didn't win in the initial round of project bids. Tabobondung says there's still plenty of legwork to do -- an environmental study needs to be conducted, along with more community consultation -- before turbines are erected in Wasauksing. The initial OPA application was for a 100 Megawatt project, but Wasauksing is now looking at something in the range of 36 MW,

the chief said.

(According to CANWEA, "wind farms in Canada currently have a capacity of 2,775 MW -- enough to power over 84,000 homes or equivalent to about 1 % of Canada's total electricity demand." Typically, one wind turbine averages about two megawatts and can produce enough electricity to meet the yearly needs of about 500 homes.)

He remains confident the project will pave the road to economic independence for the First Nation.

"It's going to be a 25-year deal, [with a chance of renewal] and about 10 years will be spent paying some of the capital costs back." After that, Tabobondung hopes to see over one million dollars a year in revenue until the partnership grows, including on-going employment. "There's going to be a lot of construction

jobs to build the project, and then maintenance and security jobs." Ultimately though, Tabobondung says it's up to the community to determine the size of the project.

The wind farm business is not something built overnight, it's estimated that most projects take about eight to ten years to get off the ground before one turbine goes in. Wasauksing First Nation is entering its seventh year investigating the economic potential.

Meanwhile, about 90 kilometres north, off Highway 69, and also along the windswept Georgian Bay shoreline, Henvey Inlet First Nation is negotiating a deal with Wind Dancer Power on a 200 - 400 MW project.

The First Nation is forging ahead with an ambitious schedule. Ken Noble, HIFN Special Projects Coordinator, says they are hoping to have a test tower up by the end

of summer and the first turbine up in about three years. The community would be 51-per-cent owners in its partnership with Wind Dancer.

Noble says the project "will provide us with a level of economic independence we do not currently possess. It will allow us to enhance currently-underfunded programs such as health and housing along with social and cultural programs."

Noble, like Tabobobung predicts the project will bring short and long-term employment opportunities for community members, as well as spin-off benefits for surrounding villages.

"Imagine a new automobile plant or a business park with a dozen new businesses setting up shop next door. The community will grow, new businesses will pop up, people who prefer to live at Henvey or come home would have opportunities that are more attractive than elsewhere."

That's another benefit that Wasauksing First Nation Elder Aileen Rice hopes to see, in addition to a booming local economy -- youth retention. If all goes well, and Wasauksing does see a wind farm in the community, Rice hopes "people can move home and work. Right now, young people who go away to finish school stay there because there are no jobs here."

Brookfield Renewable Power, another player in the green energy business, has also been partnering up with First Nations, and has a Senior Advisor of Aboriginal Affairs on staff, John Kim Bell. He says it's a good time for First Nations to get into the industry, especially with government's duty to consult.

Burk Gursoy, Director of Wind Development, says Brookfield is about to sign a Memorandum of Understanding with Batchewana First Nation, and is also working with Pic Mobert First Nation in northwestern Ontario.

Ground broken for office complex

By Jeanette Pelletier

CUTLER— Guests were on hand to see the June 26th ground-breaking ceremony at the future site for one of Serpent River First Nation's lease ventures.

Construction began later that week on a 12,000-square-foot office complex on Highway 17 East next to the Serpent River Trading Post.

"This certainly has been a long time coming and will be looked at as another milestone for the community's efforts to create profit-generating enterprises," said Chief Isadore Day, who noted that the return on investment will be the benchmark for success and that he is confident that effective planning will lead to the venture's success once anchor tenants are in place.

The project has been in the works for several months, with the lion's share of funding from the First Nation's own resources, supplemented by partnership funds from other outside sources.

Serpent River sees the project as providing greater opportunities for summer employment for community youth.

Corey Meawasige made a tobacco offering, noting: "If the project is going to bring more employment opportunity, all the power to it!"

The four-unit facility is being designed for energy efficiency to provide flexible space allocation for tenants. The building should be completed by January 2010.

For more information contact Chief Isadore Day at 705 844 2418.



Michelle Pelletier-Cook, Chief Isadore Day, Corey Meawasige and James Owl at ground-breaking ceremony.