

# The cost of going with the wind

Lucky us. We are going to be the "Saudi Arabia of wind and solar energy."

That is according to the Western Governors Association, which last month unanimously passed a resolution committing the region to the goal of developing 30,000 megawatts of "clean" energy by 2015. The governors had little news on how this near-miracle might be accomplished, other than to say they will form a committee to recommend, among other things, the federal and state tax credits and subsidies that will be necessary to bring it about.

In other words, the price of becoming the Saudi Arabia of wind and sun will be added either to your tax bill or your electric bill.

**Tracy Warner**



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That's often the way it is with "clean" energy, which isn't necessarily clean, is almost never cheap or even economically feasible without passing on the bill to consumers or taxpayers. "Clean energy" usually refers to wind, solar and biomass. Wind is intermittent, unreliable and destructive of the landscape. Solar panels are inefficient and costly. Biomass, consuming manure or waste for power, has its own environmental challenges. All are expensive. There are supposed to be scientific breakthroughs pending to make this not so, but so far they haven't shown up or haven't been big enough. Even in Europe where there has been a much larger investment in wind power and other forms of "renewable" energy, these aren't economical and can't be operated without subsidies or intentionally raising of already high power rates.

But, lucky us. There are windmills in our future. But consider their efficiency and scope. It is difficult to calculate, but based on current output estimates, it would require about 60,000 windmills to produce an average of 30,000 megawatts of electricity. That would triple the number of commercial power-generating windmills already operating in the United States. Each one of those windmills would be at least 300-foot high. They would be located in places where there is much wind and few people, which means the inland rural West, which is us. They fit best in sparsely populated areas because there will be less objection to the visual blight hundreds of whirling 300-foot towers create. No one, for instance, is seriously talking about large wind farms on the Marin County coast.

They will go in windy, relatively poor places like Garfield County. There, near Pomeroy, is where Energy Northwest, formerly WPPSS, is proposing a new wind farm. The Tri-City Herald reported Tuesday that a partnership with a British windmill maker may bring enough windmills to produce an average of 30 megawatts. The project will be dependent on relatively large tax subsidies to be feasible. One major federal wind subsidy, a 1.8-cent-per-kilowatt tax credit, has expired but is expected to be renewed soon. Without it the power would be too expensive to sell.

The next likely step is to require utilities to consume the expensive power produced whether they like it or not; to mandate that "renewables" be a certain percentage of the portfolio, no matter the cost. The cost of forced use of expensive power will likely go on your power bill.

"Clean energy," it should be remembered, never includes hydroelectricity, which is truly renewable, truly clean and truly very cheap. It never includes nuclear energy, which is proven safe and extremely productive and reliable, and emits no noxious fumes or destructive gases. We can't have that. Instead we will have to subsidize our way to being the Saudis of wind and sun. How lucky for us.

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