Wind Power: Frustrating yet Inevitable

Garth Woodruff
Andrews University, woodrufg@andrews.edu

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs

Part of the Environmental Engineering Commons, Natural Resources and Conservation Commons, Other Environmental Sciences Commons, and the Sustainability Commons

Recommended Citation
Woodruff, Garth, "Wind Power: Frustrating yet Inevitable" (2016). Faculty Publications. 426.
https://digitalcommons.andrews.edu/pubs/426

This Popular Press is brought to you for free and open access by Digital Commons @ Andrews University. It has been accepted for inclusion in Faculty Publications by an authorized administrator of Digital Commons @ Andrews University. For more information, please contact repository@andrews.edu.
Sustainability is a frustrating subject. It's relevant to time, place, emotions, and more. Easily it balloons into metaphysical or political debates about an unknown future that detract from the core of the topic. Wind, for instance. We have four offshore wind projects in the works bordering Virginia and Maryland, all proposals in different stages of approvals and support, both sides shoring up against a bitter fight. But, what is this debate really over?

**What's under the surface**

I remember standing on an Indiana farm adjacent a wetland. The fields sat well above the watershed. Traditional agricultural practices were at play and in turn were causing some fallout downhill. I rested a moment with a PhD who unpacked the unpleasant environmental situations at hand. Then, he turned and said, “We can’t tell these people they’re wrong; it’s not our place to suggest that their parents were wrong and that the legacy of that family is at fault. You can’t take security away from them, an income and a way of life. It’s their children, too, feeling the impact of change.” We quickly realize shifts in environmental ideology are more complex than what is at the surface.

The wind debate isn’t about renewable vs. fossil fuels. It's about people, jobs, visual pollution, advancing technology, and optimal timing where we hope these all meet. We use the facts to argue each side. However, the sun is the only renewable energy resource; wind is a product of the sun, and thus the two become the energy of the future. Coal, the vast majority of Maryland’s power supply, is limited. It also has environmental impacts, both in the harvest of and the carbon emissions byproduct from producing electricity. Natural gas or other petroleum products are all limited in what the earth can supply. We are reaching that limit along with the limit put on our environment by the production of carbon.

**Facts and friction**

Wind power has many benefits that can overcome these issues. It is green. It will
produce jobs in new areas, and it is a domestic, renewable product. However, it will take jobs from other regions, and it will cause pressure on some species. At the moment, we are uncertain of its cost. It may not blow during our highest power consumption times, and it will invade the majestic vistas that we consider home: the Bay and ocean.

Those are the facts. We use them to support our ideology or political opinions or to protect our homes. We have strong attachments to such things; thus the frustration and friction. Something inevitable, somewhat undesirable, and capable of shifting our lives in unpleasant ways is on the horizon. I’ve watched the debate regarding wind farms on the eastern shore of Maryland, specifically Somerset and Kent Counties. Opinions on both sides are valid. But, Maryland has approved a plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions 25 percent by 2020. That’s 55 million metric tons of carbon dioxide-equivalent annually. Much of that plan was based on the development of renewable energy sources.

**Wind potential**
The EPA has a Clean Power Plan that will add to the pressure on power plants to reduce their emissions 32 percent from 2005 levels by 2030. Currently about 40 percent of the United States emissions is from power plants. The concern here is largely focused on coal and will not ease off in the near future. We have already seen a drop in coal jobs due to increased natural gas usage, which has a shelf life. Where does wind fit?

The U.S. is ranked 16th in nations using their wind potential. The vast majority of our power demands lace our coasts (New York, Los Angeles, Washington, DC). If you take a map of power usage and lay over it a map showing our greatest wind potential, they are almost a perfect match. The U.S. is ripe for such power opportunities, which is why we are feeling the pressure from developers for farms in our region.

**Keeping the dialogue going**
I recently took a ride with that same PhD and initiated this topic. We reached this result: wind power is inevitable. The technology may need testing, proving, and perfecting. The infrastructure needs to be developed and storage demands researched. As with other fiery topics, it needs open discussion, and punting the problem to the next generation would be irresponsible.

How do we come together as a region to discuss options? Some people won’t get the best side of these decisions, so how do we justify that? We have a government setting out the demands, but it is the people who will feel the impact. How do we interject ourselves, our jobs, and our homes into the solution; not to stop or ignore it but to help the next generation? Let’s not stick our heads in the sand but rather keep the dialogue going.

**LEARN MORE:**
The Wind Power Worldwide Database: [thewindpower.net/index.php](http://thewindpower.net/index.php)
Climate Change Maryland: [climatechange.maryland.gov/plan](http://climatechange.maryland.gov/plan)
Virginia Offshore Wind Development Authority: [wind.jmu.edu/offshore/vowda](http://wind.jmu.edu/offshore/vowda)

Links: [spinsheet.com/wind-power](http://spinsheet.com/wind-power)