

Remarks: Public Comment Session Re Synergics Wind Application to the MDPSC,
Garrett College, June 11, 2009 Case No. 9191

In his initial application for a PSC permit five years ago, wrapped as it was in Old Glory, this developer claimed his project would lessen dependence on foreign oil, avoid substantial levels of carbon dioxide emissions, backdown coal, power 20,000 homes, and add significant revenue and jobs to Garrett County's economy. Moreover, he stated his 430-foot turbines would not harm wildlife, or alter the landscape in perceptible ways, or decrease value of surrounding properties, or introduce disturbances that might affect the right of neighbors to quietly enjoy their property.

What a crock! The powerful odor of mendacity carries all the way to Italy, where I recently testified before an international conference entitled *The Landscape Under Attack*. A prominent journalist there called it the "leprosy of wind."

As an intervenor in the earlier application hearing, it was easy to show all the claims Synergics made were false. And they remain so today. This new application for a 50MW windplant is submitted in the abject spirit of political cronyism, an utter lack of accountability, virtually no informational transparency, and, as is the case with this gathering tonight, empty ritual, with state officials pretending to do their jobs by allowing this limited liability company to fleece the public at ratepayer expense while raiding the federal treasury.

For much of human history, wind technology was harnessed for transportation, grinding grain, pumping water. Two hundred years ago, however, we discarded it in favor of the steam engine and the concept of coordinated, highly dispatchable energy. As the brilliant William Jevon wrote in 1865. "The first great requisite of motive power is that it shall be wholly at our command, to be exerted when, and where, and in what degree we desire. The wind, for instance, as a direct motive power, is wholly inapplicable to a system of machine labour, for during a calm season the whole business of the country would be thrown out of gear." Indeed....

This is even truer today, given that modern society exists on a foundation built upon productivity that comes from reliable, controllable, interdependent high-powered precision machine systems. All conventional units that provide electricity must pass rigorous tests of reliability and performance; they must produce their rated capacities, or a desired fraction, as expected whenever asked--or be removed from the grid. Some are like refrigerators, doing heavy-duty long-term work; others are like our toasters or irons, not working all the time but responsive when called upon to do so. This ability to perform as expected on demand is known as a machine's capacity value. Conventional power generators have a capacity value of 99.999%. Using them for 98% of our electricity, the country achieves high reliability and security at affordable cost. I should note here that the United States uses oil for less than one percent of its electricity production; our local grid uses 0.3%.

Wind technology has a capacity value of *zero* and *unreliability* is the norm. No one can be sure how much energy a wind machine will produce at any future time. It does not generate at a steady rate, as conventional units do, but rather is continuously fluctuating, almost never achieving its rated capacity. Based upon the performance of the 35,000 industrial wind turbines now in operation throughout the country, this proposed project would generate an annual average of 13MW into a grid system that produces over 140,000 MW at peak demand times. More than 60% of the time, it will generate less than 13MW. And about 20% of the time, it will produce nothing, particularly when it's needed most.

We pay a lot for electricity on demand. In fact, since the grid must precisely match demand with supply at all times, demand fluctuations continuously destabilize the grid. Wind fluctuations, which are even more unpredictable than demand flux, exacerbate this situation. Consequently, the grid must call forth conventional generators to follow and balance the wind flux, just as it does for the fluctuations of demand. But wind balancing has thermal costs that subvert much, if not all, of any CO2 savings the wind might have caused by sporadically displacing fossil-fired plants.

Wind can only be a supplementary energy source that requires a great deal of supplementation, for wind volatility must be tamed by pairing it with highly flexible conventional generators, working overtime, much in the way an automobile does when driven in city traffic. It also raises the ante for voltage regulation and transmission systems. Generating units that don't provide capacity value cannot be compared with those that do. Wind can provide only energy, not modern power performance. Energy is the ability to do work; power is the rate at which work is done. To see what this means in practical terms, consider having wind "power" your refrigerators. Or chain saws. Or the nation's gas pumps—imagine the wait and the long lines. Or how about requiring all airlines to use gliders for 20% of their fleet? Then watch the cost and CO2 emissions skyrocket while productivity drops like a stone.

Because it has no capacity value and produces power inimical to modern power performance, wind flutter can never replace precision conventional generators that do provide these functions. No coal plants have been closed anywhere due to wind projects; many new ones are now in the pipeline. No homes could be powered by wind unless those living in them want to return to the world of 1810. Any "benefits" derived from wind are hard to substantiate because they either don't exist or can be achieved with much less cost and bombast by other technologies. Its liabilities, however, are legion.

As I documented in the previous evidentiary hearing, this project will clearcut hundreds of acres. It will hover over four miles of some of the most sensitive terrain in the state, mocking the county Heritage Plan as well as the state's endangered species protections and scenic highways strictures. It will cause unlawful noise for miles downrange. For those who doubt this, see my documentary about Meyersdale, *Life Under a Windplant*, now online; it was made as evidence for the PSC hearing. The project will devalue properties in the area as much as 50%, if they could sell at all. Dynamiting will threaten wells and aquifers. Out-of-state specialists would perform most of the temporary

construction jobs. Any union jobs would be restricted in number and duration, and this won't change no matter how many paid union workers testify on behalf of this project. As for the several fulltime maintenance jobs, workers from other states could easily fill them. Because of the specialized nature of the project, there would be little value added revenue to Garrett County. Claims about local tax revenues are unsubstantiated and unsecured. When evading a direct answer about local tax revenues from his project, the Synerigics spokesman, under oath, said, "I'll do whatever the law requires." Which is a great policy if your friends can change the law to suit your interests.

Which brings us to how we got here tonight. Several years ago, the Synerigics' CEO, and fund-raiser for the state's Democratic Party, Wayne Rogers, was angered because the PSC seemed on the verge of scaling back his company's initial proposal. And so he eventually withdrew his earlier application and got a lot of help from his friends--former Speaker of the House, Cas Taylor, who had become a prominent wind lobbyist, and Mike Miller, President of the Senate. Together, they steamrolled a bill through the legislature exempting wind projects from any meaningful regulatory review. All Rogers' limited liability company need do these days is to secure grid interconnection approval. And have this meeting, since it's merely window dressing, giving people an opportunity to be heard but shutting them out of any influence on the outcome. It perfectly embodies what John Ehrlichman once called a "modified limited hangout."

How did the situation get this bad? Rogers' self-serving venality, in this era of marauding greed and disinformation, is understandable. To get media sympathy, he bad-mouthed the PSC process, falsely claiming his first application was the victim of sluggish bureaucracy when in fact it was his company that twice caused long delays in the hearing process. He then got the Washington Post columnist, Anne Abblebaum, to label people like me as BANANAS, people who dislike all development when in fact I live in a mixed-use area of a small town. He and his PR operatives continue to insist that the new law feathering his own nest was really passed for the common good. All this one expects from those who are the heirs of Enron and subprime energy.

Aside from a virtually brain-dead national and state media that does little or no fact checking, and the gush of wishful thinking that passes for scientific scrutiny from mainline environmental organizations, the real culprits here are the state agencies charged with truth telling. Let me give three examples.

Four years ago, the leadership of the Department of Natural Resources endorsed this project, as it had for two other wind applications over the years, despite the fact that its on the ground experts, under oath, testified that it should not go forward. Among their many concerns was the potential for these kinds of wildcat projects to jeopardize state endangered species, which was made clear throughout the hearing by many expert witnesses. Although the DNR ultimately recommended that the project be slightly downsized, it essentially ignored the recommendations of its own experts. Moreover, it gave short shrift to concerns of neighboring residents about potential property devaluations, noise, and other nuisances—which they amply documented. The DNR offered no remedy for the public if this project caused any problems.

For many years now, the Maryland Energy Administration has been shilling for wind as a substitute for fossil-fired generators, especially coal. One notes on its website misleading statements about what seems like significant quantities of carbon dioxide that wind plants have avoided in the production of electricity. These highly inflated estimates have about the same level of scientific rigor of as those that might be deduced from reading chicken bones and the entrails of goats. They represent badly done statistical averages from faulty baselines that do not account for many of the necessary variables, including heat rate penalties. The consultant responsible for these spurious figures is Colin High, who makes a significant portion of his income giving testimony for clients who wish to promote wind technology. Expert witnesses easily discredited Dr. High's methodology in two regulatory wind hearings in Maine and Virginia. For documentation of this, do read energy expert Tom Hewson's article, *Wind Will Not Provide Emissions Benefits*, in the July issue of *Power* magazine. Let's see actual hourly load dispatch reports accounting for all variables volatile wind energy imposes upon a grid, not projections from those paid to spin a particular result.

And then there's the snake oil from Malcolm Woolf, the MEA director. Some may recall his pitch last year at the top of the DNR's hearings on whether to put wind on state lands. He said that wind was necessary to help shore up the state's aging energy infrastructure in order to prevent rolling blackouts by 2011. He couldn't have been more disingenuous—or wrong, particularly in the face of increased demand. Adding sizable destabilizing wind energy, which provides no capacity, is a prescription for making a bad situation worse. At least in Britain there's an advertising council that provides some accountability for such nonsense. Mr. Woolf serves at the pleasure of the governor, who believes the fantasy that wind is necessary to end our dependence on foreign oil, perhaps because people like Woolf won't give him straight talk.

Not least, there's the PSC itself, which six years ago approved two wind applications after a fast track expedited review, negligently bowing to the plea from the wind LLCs that a regular review mandated to consider both environmental and socio/economic matters would damage their ability to secure Congressional production tax credits in a timely manner. No bureaucracy here. This was a ruse to avoid a thorough hearing, however, since even six years later, neither project has been built. Talk about crying, "Wolfe!" During the previous Synergics wind hearing, the PSC continued to ignore glaring evidence about the project's liabilities and its potential to harm the public. Even worse, the PSC commissioners ignored the advice of their own engineers about how little wind technology can do to make a better world. By putting its head in the sand to please its political cronies, it has enabled one of the dumbest modern energy ideas imaginable. Had the PSC spoken the truth about wind to the state's legislators, support for one of the worst bills in Maryland's history, SB566, would likely have withered away. And the PSC would not be in this impotent situation today, sitting on Wayne Rogers' lap like the Tar Baby in the old Uncle Remus stories.

The utter lack of public purpose is the real story here, as it is around the nation. And everyone knows it. The novelist Saul Bellow once said, "A great deal of intelligence can

be invested in ignorance when the need for illusion is deep." The crafted half truths and outright lies invested in the idea that wind can expiate the guilt of people sunk beneath their addiction to fossil fuels is alarming. And it makes me mad as hell. In my frustration, I can identify with the sentiments of the mugger who jumps into the path of a well-dressed man, demanding, "Give me your money." To which the man indignantly replies, "You can't do this; I'm a politician." "In that case," replied the thief, "give me *my* money." The sleaze involved with this corrupt process is shameful. Because we have so much wealth and so little sense of shame, we evidently can afford large-scale experiments like this energy scam, ones that fail hugely—remember the War on Poverty. Given our fleeting national attention span and contemptible sense of history, we remember only good intentions, not what Italians call *il buco di topo*—the hole of the rat—that our money gets thrown into. The lost opportunity costs are enormous. *Il buco di topo di vento*—the rathole of wind.

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