

GE To Build First Freshwater Wind Farm Near Cleveland

Meghan Barr, Associated Press Writer

CLEVELAND (AP) — General Electric Co. announced Monday that it plans to harness the power of winds blowing across Lake Erie by developing the world's first freshwater wind farm several miles offshore from downtown Cleveland.

GE and the nonprofit Lake Erie Energy Development Corp., or LEEDCo, announced a partnership to develop five wind turbines about 6 miles north of Cleveland Browns stadium. The turbines, which would stand about 200 feet tall, would aim to generate about 20 megawatts of power by 2012 and 1,000 megawatts by 2020.

The announcement came weeks after the Obama administration cleared the way for America's first offshore wind farm in Massachusetts. In late April, U.S. Interior Secretary Ken Salazar approved a \$2 billion Cape Wind project off the shores of Cape Cod after more than eight years of lawsuits and government reviews.

America has the world's largest onshore wind industry but lags behind other countries in offshore electric generation because of high upfront costs, heavy regulation, local opposition and technological challenges.

In Cleveland, the wind will turn blades up to 150 feet long, producing enough electricity to power up to 7,000 homes, said Cuyahoga County Prosecutor Bill Mason, who chaired a local task force that established LEEDCo.

"Obviously, the wind is free, there's no emissions," Mason said. "So it also helps clean up the environment."

Fairfield, Conn.-based GE will build and maintain the turbines, the partners said in a statement released from the annual conference of the American Wind Energy Association in Dallas. In 2009, GE had 44 percent of the U.S. wind turbine manufacturing market.

The initial phase will cost \$80 million to \$100 million, with at least 60 percent of that paid for by the sale of the electricity generated, Mason said. Government loans will also help cover building costs.

In Ohio, state officials are jockeying to put Lake Erie at the forefront of offshore wind power development through a combination of tax-cuts and regulatory measures. Lake Erie is the shallowest of the Great Lakes, a factor seen as an advantage for anchoring turbines on the lake bottom.

In December, New York state officials were scouting for developers of similar wind turbine projects in Lake Erie and Lake Ontario. Canada also has considered wind

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farm development in its Great Lakes waters.

Opponents of the Lake Erie project say the turbines would have implications for commercial and recreational navigation, water quality, fish habitat and even flight patterns for birds and aircraft.

The Massachusetts project faced intense opposition from two Native American tribes and some environmentalists and residents, including the late Sen. Edward M. Kennedy, who warned that the windmills could mar the ocean view.

Although wind power accounts for less than 1 percent of the nation's energy consumption, it is gaining ground among utilities companies and local governments as stiffer government regulations for carbon emissions loom.

Denmark installed the world's first offshore wind turbine 20 years ago, and there are offshore wind farms around Europe. China has built a commercial wind farm off Shanghai and plans several other projects.

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Associated Press Writer Doug Whiteman contributed to this report from Columbus.

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