

## Two firms plan to harvest the wind

### Associated Press

Two California wind farm developers have set their sights on wind-swept Benton County in northwestern Indiana, exciting local officials with plans for fields of giant, electricity-generating wind turbines. Orion Energy LLC of Oakland, Calif., and enXco Inc. of North Palm Springs, Calif., are both pursuing wind farms in the county, which abuts Illinois and is northwest of Lafayette.

If those plans become reality, they would become Indiana's first large-scale wind farms. In a petition filed last week with the Indiana Utility Regulatory Commission, Orion Energy proposed erecting at least 75 turbines capable of generating 130 megawatts -- enough to power between 30,000 and 40,000 homes.

Marline Breece, an Indianapolis attorney handling Orion Energy LLC's filing, said Thursday the company is reluctant to discuss the project because it is still working to determine the best locations for the massive steel towers fitted with wind-driven turbines. But Breece said Orion Energy is intent on bringing a wind farm to the flat, sparsely populated county, which is home to about 9,000 people. "Wind power is coming to Indiana," she said.

In its filing, Orion Energy, which has wind farms in five states, asks to be freed from state utility regulation because it intends to sell its energy not to individual customers but on the wholesale market, Breece said. Orion Energy's proposal follows plans announced in January 2004 by enXco Inc. for a 100 megawatt Benton County wind farm called "Indiana Winds." Barb Orr, the company's administrative land assistant in its Midwest office, said the enXco is still pursuing its plans. A wind map released in 2003 by the U.S. Department of Energy found that Indiana's breeziest regions are clustered in two areas -- one immediately northwest of Indianapolis and the second along the Illinois state line northwest of Lafayette.

Sustained winds in both clusters are between 14 mph and 16 mph at 150 feet of the ground -- where turbines with three huge blades would spin. That is sufficient to sustain wind turbines. Carol Clark, the director of the Benton County Local Economic Development Organization, said both companies are "very serious" about bringing building in the county. She said environmentally friendly wind farms would fit in well with the county's rural setting. To help pave the way for that, she said the county has developed a wind farm ordinance and permitting process. "We want everyone to know that we're a wind-friendly county," she said.

Orion Energy has opened an office in Fowler, the county seat, and has indicated that it hopes to begin construction by 2007 as part of a two-phase \$150 million to \$175 million project with wind turbines to be built at two locations, she said. Up to 50 property owners on whose land the windmills could be erected would benefit from annual payments. Brian Wright, the coal policy director for the Hoosier Environmental Council, said studies have shown that Indiana could produce up to 40,000 megawatts of electricity from the wind. "I'm sure anyone who's driven up Interstate 65 toward Chicago when the wind is blowing knows that," he said. "Sometimes it's hard to keep the car on the road." Wright said the state's environmental community is pushing for Indiana to join 21 others states and adopt a renewable energy standard requiring a set percentage of the state's power to come from renewable sources -- such as wind, solar, biomass power.

A bill that would have set such a standard failed in the last General Assembly, and the issue of renewable energy mandates was referred to a summer study committee. Sen. Thomas Wyss, co-chairman of the Regulatory Flexibility Committee, said the panel would hold hearings on renewable energy this summer.

"We really need our own energy sources, whether that be through corn -- for ethanol -- the sun or the wind," said Wyss, R-Fort Wayne.



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Wind turbines spin at a wind farm near Montezuma Kan. The wind farm contains 170 of the 289-foot-tall towers and can generate enough electricity to power 33,000 households. - CHARLIE RIEDEL / AP 2001 file photo