

Erosion violations halt Garrett County wind project; State finds 'numerous' problems on Synergics site

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by Timothy B. Wheeler in The Baltimore Sun

State environmental officials have halted construction on Maryland's second industrial wind project after finding "numerous" erosion-control violations on the remote Garrett County mountain ridge where an Annapolis-based developer is putting up 20 turbines.

The Maryland Department of the Environment ordered Synergics Wind Energy and its contractor, White Construction, to stop work until they fix all the shortcomings in their measures to prevent mud from washing off the building site into nearby streams. The work shutdown, ordered Wednesday, comes a little more than three weeks after state inspectors first visited the site in response to a complaint from a nearby resident.

"They had four miles of mountaintop completely torn up and had minimal — I mean minimal — controls," said Eric Robison, a contractor who lives on a different stretch of Backbone Mountain near Oakland. He said he contacted the state in late July after taking hundreds of photographs to document conditions at the construction site. "I was amazed at what they were doing."

MDE spokesman Jay Apperson said inspectors found problems throughout the project, including missing and inadequate "silt fences" to filter sediment out of storm runoff whenever it rains. The state officials advised the companies Aug. 3 to stop grading and excavating until the controls were in place, and both agreed to do so. The contractor was allowed to continue other construction work, such as pouring concrete.

Follow-up inspections on Aug. 9 and 17 found the companies had not completed all the erosion controls, the MDE spokesman said in an e-mail. When inspectors returned again Tuesday, they found the remedies still not complete, Apperson said, but they also found that more ground had been excavated for turbines — contrary to what the companies had agreed to. So inspectors advised a full shutdown of all construction work, and followed up with an official order the next day.

Frank Maisano, a spokesman for Synergics, noted the complaint came from opponents to the two wind projects being built on Backbone Mountain, and that "there have been no negative environmental impacts" from the faulty erosion controls. Even so, he added in an e-mail, "We expect the contractor will resolve the state's issues and continue construction very soon."

Web link: http://articles.baltimoresun.com/2010-08-26/features/bs-gr-wind-project-shutdown-20100826_1_wind-project-backbone-mountain-synergics-wind-energy