

Paying wind farms for zip FERC's idea of level field

Even as the state and the nation cut back on food for the hungry, education for the poor and care for veterans, there is one industry so close to the politicians' hearts that it may never have to suffer at all.

Wind power.

Leading government personalities accept as "green" energy something that blights our landscape and is economically unfeasible without taking money from people who could actually use it.

Our linkage between the poor and government subsidies is not a stretch.

Windmills are useful for lifting water from the ground in rural areas and where stock is kept.

But its costs are not competitive with generating electricity with falling water (nothing is) or even with nuclear power, which is made costlier than necessary by an imbalance of government oversight.

The latest in the uninterrupted gouging of the taxpayers for the benefit of business interests came when federal regulators ruled in favor of Northwest wind power generator operators who objected to having to shut down when hydropower dams were running at maximum capacity, producing all the power the system could handle.

Years ago, the wind generators were let in as a supplement to plentiful existing power sources in the Northwest.

But owners balked at losing their government supplements just because the system had all the energy it needed.

They protested, and a compliant government agency has stooped to do their bidding.

From now on, unless the agency is overruled in court, you will pay the wind farm operators cash even when there is no use for the power.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) says the Bonneville Power Administration must come up with new rules that don't "discriminate" against the wind generators.

Got that?

Don't "discriminate" against powerful lobbyists for a powerful industry by withholding payments from them that they didn't even earn in the first place.

True, we're told many of the wind farms are local utility company subsidiaries that participated in the wind farm boom encouraged by state and federal incentives.

But they knew several things when they bought into this scheme (with the use of your money):

- * Subsidies may not be forever.
- * Their business plans wouldn't work without government help.
- * Wind power could become a rip-off of the ratepayers.

Bonneville said its options were limited this spring. It said that at times it had more power than the grid could handle and the water couldn't be shunted away from the hydroelectric generators because the turbulent spill could create conditions fatal to endangered fish.

Curtailments amounted to about 6 percent of the wind farms' output between mid-May and mid-July, according to Bonneville.

Iberdrola Renewables, the U.S. division of a Spanish energy company and a major developer of American wind power, said the spring actions had the effect of supporting the prices that Bonneville was getting for wholesale power.

"FERC's ruling will stop this and other discriminatory practices and allow all energy producers to compete on a level playing field," said Don Furman, a vice president for the company.

Level? No. Tilted. The slight tilt is that your tax and rate dollars will, if this stands, roll downhill into the gaping pockets of windmill speculators who will be getting something for nothing.

That's what they call a level playing field -- one that gives them every advantage while you, dear taxpayer-ratepayer, will be left holding an empty bag.

All that stands between you and that outcome, now, is a courtroom.

Read more: <http://www.tri-cityherald.com/2011/12/12/1750164/paying-wind-farms-for-zip-fercs.html#ixzz1gQsXvaxg>