



# **The Beacon Newspaper:**

## **Governments, schools looking at wind energy**

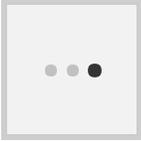
By Matt Brennan For The Beacon-News Nov 1, 2010 05:41PM

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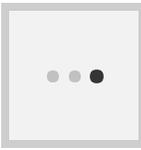
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The Hinckley-Big Rock Middle School windmill spins in the wind on Monday. The machine could produce as much as 8 kilowatts of electricity per day, according to science teacher Matt Olson. | Brian Powers~Staff Photographer

#### ARTICLE EXTRAS



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As sure as the wind blows in Illinois, there are people in the area putting it to good use.

As the mindset shifts to “thinking green,” area municipalities and schools are changing the way they think about power.

Among the green alternatives out there are wind turbines, which produce “clean” electricity and, in the long run, revenue.

Aurora Township built and activated a 140-foot, 10-kilowatt wind turbine at its grounds on Butterfield Road in July. Highway Commissioner John Shoemaker said it is part of an effort to free the township from some of its previous sources of power.

“I really had the vision of making us independent of some of the sources we’ve had in the past,” he said.

The anticipated gain from the energy produced by the windmill is about what the township pays to power streetlights, Shoemaker said. So the township sells that energy back to the ComEd grid to finance its own energy costs, he said.

“We’re trying to be good stewards of how to use the money of the township taxpayer,” he said.

It is too early to review the production and get an accurate idea for how much energy it will produce, Shoemaker said. It will take about four years to reach the return on the investment, he said.

The wind turbine was paid for by a grant from the state, and Shoemaker hopes to soon have another one up and running.

### **Education application**

While the turbines have a financial benefit, they are also educational. Shoemaker said he plans to have students through the facility on field trips.

Hinckley-Big Rock Middle School students would not have to go that far to see an operational turbine. The School District recently added one to the middle school campus in Big Rock.

The middle school science students have been working on an energy unit, science teacher Matt Olson said. The school already had solar panels on the roof, and now the students have another source of first-hand data.

Now, they will compare solar and wind power, to see which one is a better source of energy in this area, Olson said. They will compare their data with other schools in the area doing the same thing, to get a wider understanding.

“We’ll be talking about whether it’s feasible in this area to install solar or wind,” he said.

The students will also receive a business understanding on the forms of green energy, Olson said. They will begin to see which forms of energy are more profitable.

“It’s kind of nice,” he said. “We’re not just teaching about it. We have them here at the school.”

The students had not yet completed the unit, but Olson noted that solar panels are a more consistent source of energy than wind turbines. The panels do not produce as high of a level of energy, though, he said.

The wind turbine at the middle school is a 45-foot tower at the back of the property. The school received both solar and wind equipment through grants that Olson had applied for.

“I was looking for things to add to the classroom that are more exciting than reading out of the book,” he said. “It doesn’t ever hurt to apply for this kind of stuff.”

### **‘Time is right’**

With the grants that are available from the state, the time is right to begin a solar project, according to Mark Baum, director of business development with Wegman Construction.

Baum constructed the turbine for Aurora Township. It is a service the company recently started providing, but not enough people are taking advantage of it, he said.

They have assembled one other turbine, in Metamora, he said.

For Baum, things like the recent oil spill in the Gulf of Mexico serve as signs that the country needs to seriously begin looking for more alternative energy sources.

“We’re long overdue,” he said. “It’s certainly a greener, cleaner source of energy.”

There is grant money available to municipalities to complete wind projects, Baum said.

“The time is right to consider ‘small wind,’” Baum said.