

An ill wind is blowing turbine issue in our state

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People who treasure the Berkshire landscape should now be alarmed that the state owns so much of it.

The governor has declared a goal of 2,000 megawatts (MW) of wind power in Massachusetts by the year 2020, and his staff has commissioned a study showing that over half could be located in the Berkshires.

The study calculates that 559 industrial wind turbines could be built on the state's 120,000 acres here. Those turbines would be 1.5 MW each and about 400 feet tall. Calculating that another 151 turbines could be built on private land, the study estimates a combined potential for 710 industrial wind turbines on public and private land in the Berkshires. Those 710 turbines would represent 1,065 MW of wind power.

It's hard to imagine so many 40-story structures on our mountains, but the state has already mapped them, identifying more than 50 places with enough acreage and estimated wind resources to support from five to 53 industrial wind turbines.

Those places include state forests and parks and private land in almost every Berkshire community. They are on some of our most visible ridgelines, including Mount Everett, October Mountain, and the Taconic and Hoosac ranges.

Now, the governor has submitted to the state Legislature an unprecedented and alarming bill to remove remaining obstacles to his plans for the Berkshires.

The Wind Energy Siting Reform Act creates a set of extraordinary privileges for the wind industry enjoyed by no other sector in Massachusetts.

The act shifts final decisions over the siting of wind turbines from towns to a board appointed by the governor's staff.

The Energy Facilities Siting Board has never rejected a power-plant application.

The act replaces environmental laws enacted by the state legislature with standards created by the EFSB, which would strip almost all rights of appeal from towns, citizen groups, and neighbors.

The act establishes a process for converting public lands into industrial zones for wind turbines, transmission lines, and roads. Those facilities could impact scenic trails and vistas, unspoiled forests, rare species, and wetlands. Of course, trails near turbines would have to be closed for public safety.

If this act is enacted, expect to see other industries seeking special exemptions from town authority, state laws, and customary appeal rights in order to exploit our natural resources.

If the governor succeeds in convincing the legislature to overturn hundreds of years of home rule by adopting this act, he and his staff will determine the future of our landscape, our communities, and our economy.

What will be accomplished by giving him such extraordinary power?

Using numbers issued by the governor's office, 710 wind turbines in the Berkshires would satisfy 5.3 percent of our state's electricity consumption at current levels. They would reduce our overall carbon footprint by 1.5 percent.

The cost in federal, state, and local subsidies would be about \$2.7 billion over 20 years. If we subsidized all our electricity at that rate, we would spend some \$54 billion just on the subsidies.

That doesn't include the cost of jeopardizing our \$300 million tourism industry or losing all the second-home owners who will move elsewhere to more beautiful locations.

Nor does it include the cost to homeowners who find that no one wants to buy their views of 40-story industrial wind turbines.

Stripping our towns of home rule and handing imperial powers to the governor who has his own political reasons for wanting to appear "green" at our expense will be disastrous for the Berkshires, and I urge you – whether you are a resident, weekender, or visitor – to visit our website <http://www.greenberkshires.org>.