

Wind power continues to take off in southern Saskatchewan

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Wind turbines like this one near Moosomin are coming to Chaplin, Sask. Photo by Nathan Liewicki.

by Nathan Liewicki

There isn't anything that really catches the eye when driving past the small south central Saskatchewan town of Chaplin, but there soon will be. By 2016, the community that is home to roughly 300 people will be home to a wind-seeking attraction.

A wind farm of about 77 turbines will be built near the town by Algonquin Power & Utilities Corporation, and reeve Duane Doell couldn't be happier. He hopes that his community will reap similar benefits to that of Moosomin, which had a 26-megawatt (MW) wind farm - also built by Algonquin - open at the end of February.

Algonquin has said that other places, such as Moosomin, have received quite the economic boost from wind farms. "They said it brought anywhere from six to a dozen full-time jobs after it starts and however many jobs during the two years of construction.

"The construction would take care of the restaurants, the hotel, the bars and the grocery stores. It all spirals down the line," Doell said of the economic impact the wind farm ought to have in Chaplin.

Saskatchewan is starting to become known for its use of wind power as a form of energy production. In addition to the turbines in Moosomin, there are a pair of small wind farms in Gull Lake and one near Swift Current.

Sask Power President and CEO Robert Watson lists the benefits of increased wind power in the province.

"First, there's the environmental benefit where it's clean power. It's renewable energy which is very good," he noted. "We do have a good source of it in the province; however, you can't put all of your power into wind because there's some days it doesn't blow and other days where it blows too hard."

Even though the wind doesn't blow at a constant speed day-in and day-out, the decision to construct the wind power facility in Chaplin was made in part because the wind tends to be more sustained in that area of the province.

Watson, like Doell, sees the potential for job growth in the area as one of the positive factors in the impending project.

"Even if there's only several jobs in the area, it's good for the area," he said.

Other positives are that the project is a private enterprise; it should in turn support and promote new businesses to Saskatchewan, or expand any that already exist, and allow more flexibility on the power grid.

"We are going to try and get 8.5 per cent of wind power as part of our portfolio to complement our base load power. The way we did it is a private enterprise is going to run it and we're buying the power from them, and it's a very positive deal for both companies," Watson said.

"I think the real benefit is that it's good to have wind power in your portfolio. The (turbines) are 177-MW. When they're running properly and the wind is blowing it's very good reasonable power to bring into the grid."

As for Doell, he too sees nothing but good coming from continuing wind power as a source of electricity.

"I think everybody wants to see our community grow and rural Saskatchewan grow," he said. "I think it will be something everybody will be happy with."