

Wind in the Sails of Local Turbine Construction

Editorial Board
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While they're in the extended planning stages it takes more than a scorecard to keep track of wind farm projects in Kittitas County. It takes a commitment and possibly an attorney on retainer.

But once a project starts going up it's hard to miss. The Vantage Wind Power Project is starting construction this spring, and in terms of the local labor market, it could not have come at a better time.

Over the next few weeks, construction crews will reach about 200. There are certainly employees from outside the area, but there are also opportunities for local workers. While there is more construction this year than last year, that segment of the economy is still far from robust.

Any project, whether a new home Suncadia, a commercial remodel or a wind farm, helps return people to the workforce and assists families in paying bills.

This project is seven miles west of Vantage between Interstate 90 and the Vantage Highway. It is being constructed by Invenergy Wind North America LLC out of Chicago. The plans call for 60 to 69 turbines and work is supposed to be completed by the end of October.

This is shaping up to be a big summer for wind farm workers. The Kittitas Valley Wind Power Project, 12 miles northwest of Ellensburg on ridge tops on either side of US Highway 97 started road building last fall and expects to start digging foundations for turbines in May. The project could be completed by the end of the fall. The Desert Claim Wind Power Project, eight miles northwest of Ellensburg, north of Smithson Road, is scheduled for ground breaking and site preparation this summer.

The Vantage farm is a \$200 to \$220 million project. The Kittitas Valley Wind Power Project is estimated at \$250 to \$300 million and Desert Claim is projected at \$330 million. That's a lot of money in any economy. In this current climate it's akin to a gold rush.

Wind farms provide minimal long-term employment but there is a job burst during construction. While long-term would be nice, there are plenty of people who will be thankful for a summer full of employment.

Given the growth in the wind farm industry, getting experience here in Kittitas County could put a person in position to work around the state or region on wind power projects. Issues about wind farms aside, being skilled at wind farm construction will be a valuable asset for years to come.

Once constructed, the wind farms also provide a tax property boost for school districts. In this age of dwindling state support of schools, any source of revenue for schools is welcomed.

There has been much debate about wind farms in this county. But we are now at the stage where a few are going up, and whatever short- and long-term benefits they provide will be experienced.

All these projects are separate and have proceeded at their own pace. The timing of having construction occur this summer, though, couldn't be better.