

Wind farms get a boost as BC Hydro pays more for power

Wind power is finally viable and will attract new financing, Finavera VP says

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British Columbia's pursuit of electricity self-sufficiency should provide an unprecedented boost for a green energy sector that has until now failed to compete with hydro power, a wind project proponent said on Wednesday.

Myke Clark, vice-president of policy and public relations for Finavera Renewables, said the prices BC Hydro is paying independent producers for green energy have reached a level that makes wind farms a viable investment.

Earlier this year, Finavera submitted four wind-farm projects to the B.C. Environmental Assessment Office, and beginning next week the public will be invited to comment on them.

All four are in the Peace region, and they would collectively generate enough electricity to power 100,000 homes.

The total electricity capacity is about 370 megawatts. That's comparable to the capacity of a medium-sized hydroelectric dam, although the intermittent nature of wind power makes it a complement, rather than a replacement, for hydro power.

Three are in the vicinity of Tumbler Ridge, while the fourth is at Chetwynd.

Two other wind projects in the region have already been approved by BC Hydro — but the B.C. government's commitment to eliminating the province's dependence on imported power, coupled with Premier Gordon Campbell's plan to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, means Hydro will take all the green power it can get for the foreseeable future, in whatever form it presents itself.

"Without a doubt, the province of British Columbia is heading in the right direction," Clark said in a telephone interview from Quebec, where he was attending the annual convention of the Canadian Wind Energy Association.

The association has in the past been critical of B.C.'s lack of support for wind power. There are at present no functioning wind farms in B.C. compared to significant resources in many provinces including Quebec, Ontario and Alberta.

But Clark said that situation is quickly changing.

BC Hydro approved two wind farms in its 2006 call for power and Finavera and other companies are busy developing numerous additional wind projects.

Pending approval from the Environmental Assessment Office, Finavera will bid between one and four of its projects into a Hydro green-power call that will be issued in the coming weeks.

"The clean RFP [request for proposals] that's coming out is a great step for companies like ours because it shows a commitment from BC Hydro and from

the provincial government that they want these renewable forms of energy," Clark said.

"We believe our projects are economical — wind is never going to be as cheap as hydroelectricity.

"In the last call the average price per kilowatt hour was 7.4 cents for wind. If we're around there, potentially a little bit higher, that's clearly something we can work with.

"I think it shows a bit of a shift in direction from BC Hydro. For a long time the only thing they looked at was the bottom line but now I think they realize other factors are coming into play in terms of different contributors to the energy mix."

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