Oklahoma Wind Energy in Rural Communities: Identifying Policy Necessary for Productive Coexistence

Philip White, Dr. Karl Reid
Wentz Research Grant - College of Engineering, Architecture, and Technology

Dr. Stephen Stadler introduced me to this specific topic, and I decided to pursue it as the focus of my Wentz project

Firstly, I fully analyzed the Oklahoma First Energy Plan as proposed by Governor Fallin and Secretary Ming in 2011. Here are the goals from that plan that pertain to this project:

- Target 15% renewable energy in Oklahoma by 2015
- Ensure incentives to wind development are competitive with neighboring states
- Foster coordination between multiple uses of surface estate (agricultural, oil, and gas, wind development)

Next, I contacted Kylie McNabb at the Oklahoma Department of Commerce. She directed me to the current NOI filed by the OCC

- Conducted a literary review of all comments filed with the Notice of Inquiry. Figure 2 is an example comment
- Conducted a literary review of the summary of Wind Energy Development NOI released by the Public Utility Division of the OCC

Most comments filed regarded wind energy projects in Osage County. Figure 1 shows the average wind speed of Oklahoma with Osage County highlighted. Wind speed is directly related to power output of wind turbines. This is important in understanding the wind energy developer’s motives

After identifying the main conflicts, I cross-referenced Oklahoma’s State Law regarding wind energy development with similar code from states and communities that display similar wind output as Oklahoma (Illinois, Iowa, Ohio) to make policy recommendations on the mitigation of these regional conflicts

- It is evident through comparative research that Oklahoma is one of the least regulated wind energy producing states in the USA
- Wind energy developers have capitalized on the relatively open regulation climate of the state and Oklahoma now ranks as the fourth highest state in wind power capacity as of December 31, 2014 with 3.782 MW output
- Unfortunately, the open regulatory environment has had dissatisfactory effects on rural communities and rural landowners which stem from three regulatory areas within Wind Energy: Siting of wind energy sites, decommissioning of wind energy sites, and notification of landowners

The Oklahoma Corporation Commission (OCC) opened a Notice of Inquiry (NOI) in order to identify and examine the issues regarding wind energy development in the State of Oklahoma. Parties on each side of the conflict were asked to submit written comments to the OCC’s Court Clerk’s Office. Here is a timeline of the events of the NOI:

- May 20, 2014 - Senate President Pro Temp Bingman requests the OCC conduct the NOI
- July 9 and 11, 2014 - Director of the PUD holds informal meetings with various stakeholders in the forthcoming NOIK
- August 12, 2014 - Notice Of Inquiry Filed
- August 26, 2014 - Initial Comments Due
- September 11, 2014 - First Technical Conference at 10:00 a.m. Courtroom 301
- September 30, 2014 - First Technical Conference Comments Due
- October 15, 2014 - Second Technical Conference at 10:00 a.m. Courtroom 301
- October 31, 2014 - Second Technical Conference Comments Due
- December 2, 2014 - Hearing 10:00 a.m. Courtroom 301
- December 30, 2014 - Summary of Wind Energy Development NOI released by Public Utility Division

The Oklahoma Corporation Commission should be the enforcer of decommissioning obligations. The Oklahoma currently has 9 required notification practices for developers to notify landowners. Notification is most likely the only place a state-wide law would be most effective with respect to the other two issues of this conflict. At least 180 days prior to development, notification to landowners within a 3 mile radius should include developer’s intentions, the planned project area, and construction timeline.