

## Phillips County awarded \$2.5 million energy grant

Written by Holyoke Enterprise

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U.S. Department of Energy Secretary Steven Chu recently notified the Phillips County Commissioners they are one of six recipients of the Community Renewable Energy Deployment Grant. The award is \$2.5 million. Upon notification, Phillips County Commissioner Chairman Jerry Beavers said, "This is very exciting for the county."

NECO Wind has been putting together a plan to build a 650 MW wind turbine-based renewable energy project in Phillips, Sedgwick and Logan counties. NECO, LLC was formed in 2008 by local community members and landowners in the three counties. They formed a relationship with National Wind to manage, develop and take their project through the construction phase.

In the summer of 2009 the commissioners were approached by Scott Hafner, Senior Wind Developer of National Wind, LLC, a wind development company out of Minneapolis, Minn. He asked if the commissioners would consider applying for a Community Renewable Energy Deployment Grant on behalf of the NECO project. National Wind is working with NECO Wind, LLC, a local northeast Colorado community-based wind energy development company.

Phillips County agreed to act as a grant applicant on behalf of NECO Wind and their managing partner National Wind. The grant application was for \$6 million toward an estimated \$59 million initial project.

The initial phase is scheduled to produce 30 MW of electricity. Seventeen towers would be placed in Phillips and Logan counties.

Even though the entire request was not approved, Hafner indicated the project should still be able to move forward. National Wind is assisting NECO in their efforts to provide full financing for the initial project phase. The county will act as the pass-through agency for the grant, receiving and then moving the money to NECO for the project.

The initial 30 MW phase is slated to tie in to the Haxtun electric substation. NECO is finalizing negotiating for sale of the 30 MW of electricity to be produced by the 17 generators.

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At the time of the grant application, NECO had over 21,000 acres in Phillips and Logan counties under lease for the project. NECO Wind believes landowners and the local community should be allowed to share in both the turbine royalty payments and land leases, as well as share in the potential revenues gained from a successful project.

Actual construction time should take from six to nine months. NECO Wind has already completed a feasibility study, secured the land required, completed the transmission analysis and filed the inter-connect request.

Once the financing is secured, the project will move toward the permitting phase. An environmental assessment will be completed.

Both Phillips and Logan counties require conditional use permits for a project of this nature. The State of Colorado requires an Air Pollutant Emission Notice through the Department of Public Health and Environment.

A State Highway access permit will be needed from the Colorado Department of Transportation. The project also requires that NECO Wind verify they have consulted with the U.S. Division of Fish and Wildlife Services through the Public Utilities Commission.

Exact location of the 17 towers has not been determined. National Wind will utilize sophisticated modeling software and the wind data already gathered to layout a wind farm which should maximize energy efficiency.

National Wind is a leader in developing utility scale (50 MW or more) community wind energy projects. They currently have community-based projects in Minnesota, Iowa, North Dakota, Ohio, South Dakota and now Colorado.

The Department of Energy's program provided \$20.5 million to encourage community-based renewable energy projects. The other five recipients include projects in Montpelier, Vt.; Forest County, Wis.; Sacramento, Calif.; and the University of California at Davis, Calif.

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