

# StarTribune

## Big new wind farm for Rock County

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By the end of this year, visitors to the Blue Mounds near Luverne will notice a change in scenery to the north and west, thanks to the largest wind energy project Rock County has ever seen.

The 200-megawatt Prairie Rose Wind Farm will consist of 119 1.68-megawatt GE wind turbines, with the potential for up to 125 turbines that will extend 400 feet from the ground to the uppermost tip of the blade.

Power generated from the Prairie Rose Wind Farm will be sold to Xcel Energy. The wind farm is expected to go online in December.

Construction on the \$350 million project will begin May 7 with the establishment of a construction site about a mile west and north of Hardwick.

Lease agreements have been signed with landowners in portions of Rose Dell, Springwater and Denver townships for the towers, and rights have been acquired for placement of nearly 30 miles of transmission line that will run from the center of the wind farm to the Split Rock Substation near Brandon, S.D.

Justin Pickar, director of development for Geronimo Wind Energy, the company spearheading the project, said lease payments to project landowners in the Prairie Rose Wind Farm will amount to approximately \$1.1 million annually or \$22 million over the 20-year contract.

Rock County and the affected townships will also benefit from the wind farm, to the tune of \$600,000 per year for the county in wind energy production taxes and approximately \$150,000 to the three hosting townships.

The more immediate economic impact is that up to 180 temporary jobs will be added in Rock County during the construction project, with as many as 200 to 300 workers on site during the peak of construction, Pickar said.

Minneapolis-based Mortenson Construction has been selected as the project's general contractor.

Planning for the Prairie Rose Wind Farm began in 2008 with wind studies on Rock County's portion of the Buffalo Ridge.

"What attracted us to the area was the combination of access to the transmission system ... and good land for the construction of a wind farm," said Blake Nixon, president of Geronimo Wind Energy.

Nixon said plans are already being discussed for an expansion of the farm, to add 100 megawatts north and northeast of the Prairie Rose site.

That project will extend into Pipestone County.

As for the first phase of the project, Pickar said construction will move from southwest to northeast.

From May 21 through Aug. 3, construction workers will concentrate on building main roads to each turbine site. Foundations are expected to be put in place between early June and the end of August; and turbines will be erected between Aug. 1 and Nov. 30.

"It's like an assembly-line process," Nixon said of the construction. "The crews will move from site to site. It will start relatively slow, ramp up in June and apex ... with big trucks and really big components coming into the area starting in August -- that will last about 12 weeks."

During meetings with landowners earlier in the week, Nixon said most of the concerns about construction of the wind farm focused on crop damage, tile repairs and road closures.

"We have a very clear process that we work with farmers to reimburse for any and all crop damage done," Nixon said, adding they will also compensate landowners for future productivity loss due to soil compaction from the large equipment that will be used to access each site.

Betsy Engelking, Geronimo Wind Energy vice president, said a \$40,000 annual contribution to a community fund will be controlled by a local board of directors, to consist of three township officials, three landowners and one at-large member from Rock County.

"They will decide where the money is spent to benefit the community," she said.

Among ideas for those funds are purchasing playground equipment, contributing to the cost of a road grader, supporting fire departments, FFA chapters and other options.

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