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## 234-megawatt wind farm proposed in Columbia County

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Milwaukee-based WE Energies wants to build a 90-turbine, 234-megawatt wind farm located between the Columbia County villages of Cambria and Friesland.

In an application filed Monday with the Wisconsin Public Service Commission, WE Energies proposes to locate the turbines with a hub height of up to 262 feet generally north and west of Friesland and northeast of Cambria in the towns of Randolph and Scott.

The project would gather power from up to 90 turbines, each with a half-acre footprint, by using up to 50 miles of 50-foot-wide corridors for collector cables. Twenty miles of permanent roads would be used to access the turbine sites, according to the application.

WE Energies acquired an option on the site from Florida Power and Light when it sold its interest in the Point Beach nuclear plant, said Brian Manthey, a WE Energies spokesman.

"The area was already sited for its potential for wind power, once we decided to (exercise the option) we saw that it was a good possibility for us, a good area for wind power production," Manthey said.

Construction costs haven't been finalized for the wind farm, now called the Randolph Wind Project, because the number and type of wind turbines haven't been determined. WE Energies plans to submit those costs to the Public Service Commission within a few months, Manthey said.

He compared the new proposal to the company's \$300 million, 88-turbine wind farm spread across 10,600 acres in Fond du Lac County. The Blue Sky Green Field wind project, which became operational in May, has a 145-megawatt capacity, enough to power 36,000 homes, according to WE Energies.

It used turbines that are 397 feet tall from foundation to the blade tip.

Ryan Schryver, Clean Wisconsin's wind power advocate, called the proposal a great example of the "choice that we have to make regarding our energy production."

"At the same time that WE Energies is looking at clean energy sources, Alliant Energy is proposing to build a coal-fired power plant in Columbia County," Schryver said. "Alliant has stated that they would prefer to build the coal plant in Cassville, but Portage is the alternative site being considered by the Public Service Commission.

"We have to begin to wean ourselves off of dirty coal,

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and wind power is one of the best energy sources that we have to do that. We hope that the Public Service Commission agrees and focuses more on developing renewable energy sources like wind, solar and biofuels that can help build a new clean energy economy instead of perpetuating our dependence on dirty coal," Schryver said.

In siting the Blue Sky Green Field project, the commission complied with a request by Clean Wisconsin and others to move three wind turbines the group said were located too close to the eastern boundary of Horicon Marsh, a migratory bird refuge. Many birds fly into wind turbines and are killed.

"We're generally for wind projects as long as they're not located where they could do some other environmental damage," Schryver said.

Manthey didn't know of any environmental challenges facing the Randolph Wind Project, but admitted the permitting process has only begun.

WE Energies is also in the process of talking to landowners and local governments about easements for the turbines, which Manthey characterized as "going good."

A call for comment to the Columbia County Planning and Zoning Department regarding the proposal wasn't immediately returned.

Manthey called the proposal "significant" in helping the utility reach its goal of providing up to 25 percent of its energy from renewable sources by 2013. Compared to biomass and other renewable energy sources, wind is "certainly more accessible and more reachable and we anticipate other projects down the road."

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