

Wind is the future of energy in New Brunswick

Expert says it's better late than never.

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With doomsday messages of global warming and energy crisis bombarding people everyday, the new community wind energy projects happening across New Brunswick is nothing less than a breath of fresh air.

Preneal Canada, the Canadian subsidiary based in Moncton, is working with various communities throughout the province to develop wind farms, in what is touted as the future of renewable energy production in Canada.

Preneal Canada President, Christian Monod says, "The community wind projects are our way of doing in Canada what we have been doing in other countries for decades. New Brunswick is our first Canadian project, and we want to find common interest between us and the community to maximize benefits for both sides of the partnership." This partnership consists of shared ownership of the wind farms where 30 per cent will be locally owned.

"Co-ownership is where the big money is for the communities," Monod emphasizes. "It's not only royalties. The royalties are very small compared to what you can get through co-ownership." Preneal Canada came to New Brunswick one year ago to identify suitable areas with good wind quality.

"We chose New Brunswick because we have a vision. And we are not the only ones having this vision," Monod explains, "The Maritimes and Eastern Quebec have good winds. They have vast zones where you can build wind farms far away from people and without disturbances." With the ever increasing energy demands, in face of decreasing energy resources, Monod stresses the future is in renewable energy.

"What makes wind energy stand out is that it is one of the lowest cost. When I talk cost, I mean total cost: Cost of operations, plus cost of decommissioning the plant at the end, renewing the asset, environmental impact, this all has to be counted. So when you consider all this, the cost of "cheap" fossil fuel is actually a lot higher than wind.

"In terms of renewable energies, wind is the most environmental. It doesn't pollute, there is no hazard in transportation, and there are no greenhouse gas emissions," Monod says. "You can dismantle, decommission a wind plant, take out the concrete and put the earth back. Plant some grass, and the next morning you can put some sheep on it." New Brunswickers will have to wait a few years for this clean energy.

"It takes about two-three years for a normal project to take birth, with another year for construction," says Monod. "So four years altogether if everything goes well. But sooner or later it will be built. If it makes sense commercially, and here it makes a lot of sense, it will be done." With six projects already in the works, with a combined projected output of 800 Mw, Monod promises that "New Brunswick will not only be the energy hub in general, it will be the renewable energy hub for nearby economies. For us it's not a vision, it's a reality." Caraquet has recently announced its participation in the community winds project. Monod declined in naming the other five sites.

"We do not want to announce the localities of the new wind farms. This is not only our project; it is also a project of the communities. So we much prefer that they make the announcements when and where they choose.

"I really wish for the communities to benefit - wind energy is the ideal vector for self sufficiency," Monod says. "There is no better vector- there is no subsidy, we don't ask for a dime from the government. This is how it is built in other countries having decades of wind experience. The money is the wealth of the people and the region.

"You don't hear too much about wind energy as the ideal for self sufficiency, because it has taken time for people to realize it," Monod laments, "but it is better late than never."