

What it's like to live near a wind turbine

Phil Bloomstein

We have the distinct "privilege" of living 1,000 feet from tower T3 of the Beaver Ridge Wind Project. We have tower T3 staring us right in the face year round.

As disturbing as the visual presence of a nearly 400-foot wind turbine is, that pales in comparison to the noise the turbines often produce. I would dare say we now live in one of the noisiest neighborhoods in Waldo County.

Before the turbines were erected on Beaver Ridge, I visited wind turbines in other towns with the knowledge that one was going to be built very close to my house. I came away thinking living next to one was going to be somewhat annoying but that it probably was going to be OK. I was encouraged by promises from Competitive Energy Services, the parent company of the developer Beaver Ridge Wind LLC.

The town of Freedom's planning and permitting of the Beaver Ridge Wind Project was marked by deceptions, poor planning and small-town politics at its worst. Many community members were so pro-green they were susceptible to what I believe were the developer's deceptive practices and blinded to the impact the turbines would have on their neighbors.

What is it really like living next to the turbines? There are "good days," but there are way too many bad ones. Although the noise is almost always there, it is not constant in its intensity or type of sound. In minutes it can turn from a mildly annoying drone to a nightmarish pulsating noise so oppressive that any outdoor activity is challenging. The noise also penetrates into the house. Many nights the noise is very loud and the pulsating lasts right into the morning.

The wind industry, often in concert with well-meaning government officials and environmental activists, uses all of its power to diminish complaints and convince the general public that "wind farms" are quiet and that most folks don't mind living next to them.

When CES came to Freedom, they assured us the turbines would be quiet. During the permitting process, they presented a study showing the noise level at our home hardly ever would be above 45 decibels, or dBa. The truth is the noise often exceeds the promised levels, many times twice as loud.

Documents can be found and downloaded on the Beaver Ridge Wind Web site that explain, "In some hilly terrain where residents are located in

sheltered dips or hollows downwind from the turbines, turbine sounds may carry further and be more audible."

Why was this not considered in our case?

Then there are the possible negative health effects. No matter that current studies are ongoing and still scientifically unproved, after a night of pulsating turbine noise I get up thinking this can't be good for my family. I can only imagine what it would be like if one were predisposed to headaches, depression or a sleep disorder.

Perhaps you are thinking, well, someone has to suffer for the good of humanity, it might as well be the Bloomsteins. Maybe you are right, but does that give the developers and the wind energy industry the right to mislead residents about the real impact of living near turbines? I might be less angry if they had said you will be sacrificing the quiet rural life you once had for the good of the environment.

For us the damage is done. The turbines are up, and most likely they are not coming down for a long time.

So the question for my family and me is: What do we do? We have lived and worked on our property for the past 34 years. Do we leave the house we built, the gardens we've planted, the place my children and their children love? Or do we stay and learn to deal with the noise, worry about unknown health hazards, keep windows closed at night in the summer, sleep with earplugs on loud nights - whatever it takes to stay sane?

We seek justice in the form of adequate compensation and feel that we should not be forced to find it in the courts or make deals with the developer under conditions of confidentiality.

We also hope in some small way we can prevent others from suffering a similar fate.

Please don't be so zealous in your support of alternative energy that you allow an industry, even a green one, to avoid any reasonable regulations.

There is no need to repeat the mistakes that were made in Freedom.

Phil Bloomstein of Freedom has been the director of technology in SAD 34 for the past 10 years.