

Date: Sep 10, 2010; Section: Local; Page: A3

Wind turbine gets breezy start Groundbreaking ceremony heralds project's start

By **MIKE JOHNSTON** senior writer

The brisk wind blowing across Del Knudson's 10-acre rural property on Thursday morning seemed a good omen for the ceremonial start of construction on a 113-foot wind turbine at the site.

The 114-kilowatt turbine, when completed later this year, will be the first community wind-powered electricity generator in Kittitas County, and in the state.

More are planned.

The wind that morning was later estimated at 22 miles per hour on the ground at the Knudson place 10 miles west of Ellensburg, but Terry Meyer, managing director of Cascade Community Wind Co. LLC, pointed out that farther up, where that first turbine's three blades will spin and make electricity, it's likely 30 mph or more.

Meyer and his company on Thursday conducted a groundbreaking ceremony at the Knudson tower site as about 35 supporters, state lawmakers, project subscribers, neighboring landowners, utility company representatives and others looked on.

"What a good start to get people used to the availability of community distributed wind power that stays in the county," Meyer said before the ceremony. "Neighbors around here with three to 20-acre parcels will see the turbines and want to join in."

More coming

Meyer told the crowd that the second local turbine, called the 3 Bar G Ranch project on land owned by Frank and Robert Gregerich, was about five miles farther west on Thorp Prairie and also would start soon.

Six other community wind projects are planned around the state next year, he said.

Standing on hay bales with the huge towers of the Kittitas Valley Wind Power Project wind farm far behind him in the distance, Meyer said the Thursday ceremony caps nearly two years of work in the county to establish community, or distributed renewable energy projects.

Meyer said the big difference between the industrial-sized wind farms behind him and his company's much smaller projects is that the power put in the grid by community wind projects stays in the area.

He said it's likely the power generated by one of Cascade Wind's projects will get used before it reaches a Puget Sound Energy substation.

Meyer said most of the power generating capacity from the wind farms is sold to California firms or outside the state.

Kittitas County commissioners turned down a proposed ordinance this spring that would have allowed community wind projects with taller towers of 200 to 350 feet. The Knudson and 3 Bar G Ranch projects fall under a revised "small wind" ordinance allowing towers with tip heights of 120 feet or less.

For the community

Del Knudson, before the ceremony, said he's lived in the Kittitas Valley all his life and sees the project as benefiting the community, his neighbors and others purchasing subscriptions to help finance each \$250,000 tower.

Subscribers buying into a project get their personal power bills paid by some of the income from selling the small turbine's power to Puget Sound Energy.

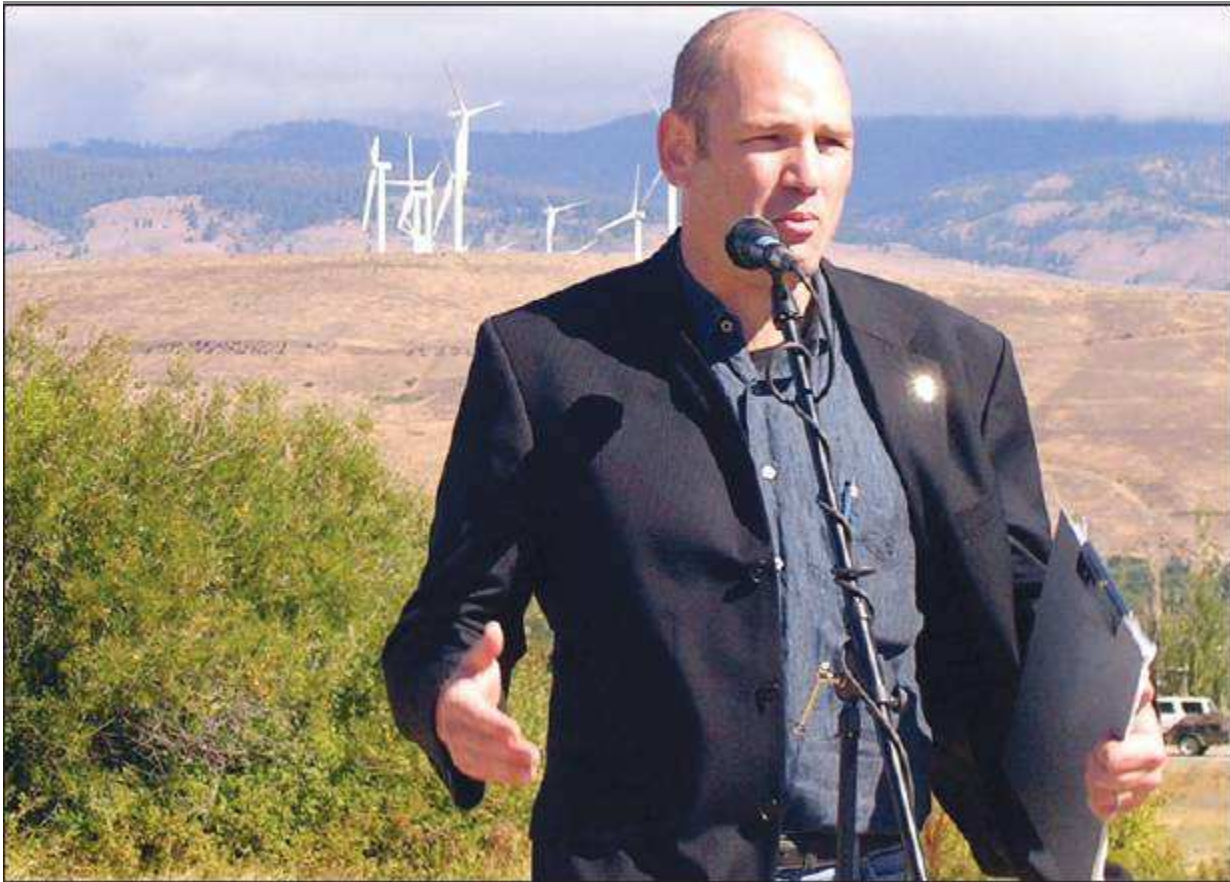
"I'm not going to get very much out of it; it's more for the community than anything else," Knudson said.

Meyer expressed the hope that every major stretch of PSE's three-phase power lines in rural Kittitas County will have a community wind project putting power into the local grid.

"Regular people who own a regular sized piece of rural land should also get benefits from the wind," Meyer said.

One of the subscribers supporting the Knudson project, Pico Cantieni of Red Bridge Road east of Cle Elum, said he got involved after reading an initial story about community power.

He told the crowd he is so excited and "energized" by the project that his wife, Margaret Taylor, wants to purchase a subscription to the 3 Bar G Ranch project. Cantieni held up an envelope with the new subscription payment and handed it to a smiling Meyer as the crowd applauded.



Mike Johnston / Daily Record

Terry Meyer, managing director of Cascade Community Wind Co., speaks Thursday to the crowd at groundbreaking ceremonies for the first community wind turbine in Kittitas County.