

Downwind Destruction

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In the immortal words of pint-sized philosopher Bart Simpson, “I didn’t think it was physically possible, but this both sucks and blows.” Although the precocious star of The Simpsons certainly wasn’t referring to industrial wind turbines when he uttered those classic words more than 15 years ago, they now seem more appropriate than ever.

Forget what the three leaders of Ontario’s main political parties are selling you as the hot topics on the election hustings right now. For many of us in rural areas of the province, there’s really only one relevant, resonant issue. If you have to ask what that is, you need to get out more often.

Try driving down Kerwood Road in North Middlesex - if you dare. Or travelling on Elginfield Road or Thomson Line. Or why not check out Hwy 402 between Watford and Strathroy, if you want to witness the destruction that’s taking place from the convenience of your vehicle window while driving by at 100+ km/hour.

Oh, forget that. Just drive anywhere in North Middlesex or Lambton Shores. You can already see the monstrous 420-foot turbines or their companion 100-foot transmission poles from practically every part of both municipalities – or will soon be able to.

By the time NextEra Energy has all 174 of its towers and closer to 300 galvanized steel poles erected in the next year, they will be as unavoidable as the painful increases on your future hydro bills.

And let’s not even start on Suncor Energy’s projects or the rest of NextEra’s wind centres or the impending phase two and phase three of the ultimate wind ghettoization of our area. Some estimates say we could have upwards of 1,000 of these monstrosities cluttering our local landscape in the next few years, along with untold numbers of transmission poles, substations and other eye-gouging paraphernalia.

But, why worry? The Ontario government, the wind energy companies from Florida and Calgary, and any leaseholders that will talk to you all assure us there are no concerns whatsoever.

No health hazards. No stray voltage. No harm to wildlife or plants. No disturbance to livestock. No long-term effects on our hydro costs. No loss of prime agricultural land. No noise issues. No neighbours being pitted against neighbours. No lack of consultation or stripping of local residents’ rights. Why, it’s like paradise slathered in buttercream icing and topped with a giant maraschino cherry.

Unfortunately, for anyone with a teaspoon of grey matter between their ears, that’s all a bit hard to swallow. Think about this strange group of bedfellows: the government, the turbine companies and your neighbouring farmers. Should we believe what they’re telling us?

First off, the Liberal government doesn’t care one smidgen for you or me in our little Progressive Conservative enclave. According to a blog from Wind Power Grab, out of 6,736 industrial wind turbines approved as of this February, over 6,000 are located in PC or NDP ridings. If you take out the 537 turbines near Liberal ridings in Thunder Bay, less than 1% of all installations are in Grit territory.

It’s a pretty simple equation. Liberal ridings = no turbines. Non-liberal ridings = when do we start pouring the 180,000 pounds of concrete for the next installation?

Heck, they don't even want gas plants in Liberal ridings, so they certainly won't be sticking any wind turbines there.

Conclusion? Why would you believe a government that cares so little for its rural residents that it burdens them with thousands and thousands of these beasts, at the same time stripping those non-Liberal voters and their local governments of any powers to oppose them.

How about Florida-based NextEra Energy and its consolidated revenues of \$15.1 billion? Are they a reliable, trustworthy source of information? Not according to both elected officials and municipal staff in our local area. Many of the names they have used to describe them are either libelous and/or unfit to print in a family newspaper.

As far as my own personal dealings, let me say that, although they've treated me politely in most instances, they have also consistently refused to answer questions, contradicted themselves on numerous occasions, or given me information that's utterly unbelievable and totally preposterous.

And, finally, the leaseholders. Frankly, I don't know what to think of these people. They certainly seem to believe what the Ontario government and NextEra have told them – or why would they have signed over acres of their prime agricultural land for the next half-century?

On a one-to-one basis, they'll tell you they're happy as diamond-encrusted clams with the way NextEra has treated them, delighted to be producing clean, green energy and convinced that anyone who claims that industrial wind turbines cause any concerns whatsoever is a liar.

But, what they say in private may be totally different. Rumours persist that many local leaseholders regret signing contracts or wish they could get out of them. It's a moot point anyway, since they're locked into virtually iron-clad agreements backed up by their trusted partners, the wind turbine companies and our own beloved Liberal government.

So, if you choose to believe this trifecta of ultra-reliable sources in making your determination of whether industrial wind turbines are a positive or negative development, that's entirely your choice.

Personally, I've got enough information to make up my own mind. In my humble opinion, turbines provide proof positive that, as young Master Simpson concluded, it is most definitely possible to both suck and blow. And, as a bonus, likely bankrupt us all at the same time.