

Farmers Say NW Indiana Airport Costing Wind Power

AP Wire Service

KENTLAND, IN (AP) – Some farmers would like to see a small airport in rural northwestern Indiana closed in order to open up a large part of the state's windiest area for electricity-producing wind turbines.

While more than 100 turbines are operating on a wind farm in Benton County, 77 square miles of neighboring Newton County are off limits to such turbines because of Federal Aviation Administration safety rules for Kentland Municipal Airport. Mark Simons, who owns a 400-acre farm next to the airport, said he frequently sees turbine blades and other parts heading to the nearby wind farms.

"I can see them, but I can't have

them," Simons told the Journal & Courier of Lafayette. "It's because of this airport that hardly anyone uses and costs the town money. With turbines, we can help the county, help the city, help more people than the airport is."

Kentland Mayor Dave Smart said he wasn't interested in shutting down the airport. "If you want to draw new business in, this is what you need – an airport," Smart said.

The Kentland airport opened 34 years ago and has received more than \$1 million in FAA improvement grants since 2001. That includes nearly \$345,000 in 2004 for runway lighting and other electrical work and \$323,000 last year to lower electric lines to extend a 3,500-

foot runway by 500 feet.

"I feel for the farmers who have land that want to make money with wind turbines," Smart said. "We can't just shut it down. The FAA is not in the business of shutting down airports."

Simons contends that if 100 turbines could be placed near the airport, they could generate \$1 million in tax revenue and add jobs to the area.

"These are the jobs they've been waiting for," Simons said. "This is the future." Estimates from the U.S. Department of Energy identify the area northwest of Lafayette near the Indiana-Illinois state line as having the greatest average winds in the state.

"We are right smack in the windiest

part of Indiana, and we can't do anything about it," Simons said.

FAA records show the airport averaged 26 flights a day in 2008. But the airport reported just 36 flights for all of last month.

"Because of the bad weather this spring, we have had low counts," airport manager Chuck Classen said.

Natalie and Greg Gilbert, who own 1,200 acres near the airport, believe they could make \$8,000 to \$12,000 a year per turbine. "I think it would be a shame not to investigate the potential economic benefits that the windmill farms would bring to Newton County," Natalie Gilbert said. "There really isn't a reason not to just talk about it and get the facts." ☞



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