

The Globe



NOT IN MY BACKYARD, FRONT YARD OR WITHIN A HALF-MILE

Rural landowners air opposition to industrial wind farms



Tom Behrends stands outside his rural Brewster home, not far from a wind turbine across the road.
Tim Middagh / The Globe

By Julie Buntjer
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Worthington

When Tom Behrends purchased his farm east of Brewster in 1993, he envisioned peace and solitude on the prairie.

That's no longer the case. The serenity Behrends once enjoyed was invaded by steel behemoths, or noise generators as he calls them. They interrupt his view, the "whooshing" of the blades delivers a constant noise and shadow flicker is more than an occasional disruption.

Behrends was serving his country in Afghanistan when the turbines were permitted. He was told they were going up, but at the time he envisioned the towers would be placed in the middle of the section — not 1,100 feet from his home.

Behrends has complained about the turbines since 2010, more recently writing letters to each commissioner in Jackson and Nobles counties. He's placed ads in newspapers about the 800-pound gorilla he calls Big Wind. He also took to social media earlier this month to oppose Budweiser's advocacy for wind energy.

Behrends said he's lost sleep over the turbines — the noise either wakes him or keeps him from falling asleep — and believes he's a prisoner in his own home.

"You're just aggravated by the noise," he said, and the shadow flicker that's cast across his home certain times of the year.

"My office is on the east side of my house and when I'm trying to do taxes for the farm, I've got this blade flashing across my computer screen," Behrends said. "I call it torture — it drives you nuts."

Behrends said standards for wind towers say up to 30 hours of shadow flicker is allowable per year, and that turbine noise up to 50 decibels is OK, but he disagrees.

"There should be none of that," he said, but he believes money talks, and no one will buck big wind.

"The commissioners, it's almost like they don't care about their residents — they need the tax money," Behrends said.

He has connected with anti-industrial wind energy groups like the Coalition of Rural Property Rights in Iowa and Wind Locked LLC, which has formed in Faribault and Martin counties.

"I didn't fight for this country to have crap like this go on," Behrends said. "That's why I'm fighting this now. All I want is for people not to have to go through what I've gone through."

Desperation and division

Eugene "Pucky" Sandager's rural Hills farm has been in his family for six generations, but he wishes he could pick up his land and move it across the state line to South Dakota, where wind farms are much more regulated.

"There will not be a windmill put up on any of our land down here; my brothers all agree," Sandager said.

It has become clear, however, that not all of his neighbors agree.

"Things the way they are with the farm economy, it's very enticing to sign up," Sandager said. "Some farmers are desperate."

An investor in MinWind, a wind energy project built years ago near Beaver Creek, Sandager soured on wind energy after the company went bankrupt. He was among many investors who never saw a dime. MinWind was bought by RES, the same company that now wants to build a 100-megawatt wind farm in Martin and Beaver Creek townships.

Sandager said he is all for the use of renewable energy, but he'll stick with ethanol and biodiesel — and the antique windmill that efficiently pumps water on his farm. His beef with industrial wind is that he believes the federal tax credit offered for developing wind energy is a scam.

He also believes the ones who will get hurt are the farmers — the landowners who sign contracts for wind turbines to be built on their property.

"When you give them a windmill, you give up rights on that land for the rest of your life," Sandager said. "They can declare bankruptcy and you're stuck with a pedestal and windmill that has no value. When you want to spray with an aerial or spray rig, you have to get their permission. If you want to hunt on your ground, you have to

OPPOSITION: Page A4

Green energy is golden for counties

By Julie Buntjer
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WORTHINGTON — While opponents of industrial wind farms list many reasons why they don't like wind turbines, supporters of the green energy projects can just as easily refute their claims.

Larkin Township farmer Gene Metz is an investor in Community Wind South and hosts a wind turbine on land he and his son, Mike, own in Summit Lake Township. They also farm around two other wind turbines.

Like many landowners, Metz signed on to host a turbine

because of the financial benefit. Most developers want land leases of 20 to 30 years, with the option to extend it another 20 years. The most common arrangement has landowners receiving an annual payment in exchange for putting a turbine on their property. Contracts prohibit landowners from revealing how much they are paid.

Metz did say, however, that landowners with wind turbines share in nearly as much money as what the county collects each year in wind energy production tax.

"It gets to be a big deal," Metz said, noting that more than \$12

million in wind energy production tax was paid in 2018 in Minnesota. When you double that amount, knowing it's going to landowners, it's a huge economic benefit.

The wind energy generated by Community Wind South currently goes onto the grid, but a new Nobles Cooperative Electric substation near Lismore will soon be pulling from the grid to serve local homes, farms and businesses. That is exciting news for Metz, a Nobles County commissioner and member of the Minnesota Rural Energy Board.

GOLDEN: Page A2

Wind energy production tax revenues a boost for counties

TAX PAYABLE					
County	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
Cottonwood	\$235,765	\$257,400	\$251,029	\$533,487	\$748,116
Jackson	\$1,449,498	\$1,634,531	\$1,710,985	\$1,991,885	\$2,202,936
Murray	\$1,250,705	\$1,348,927	\$1,358,327	\$1,382,798	\$1,323,936
Nobles	\$1,041,222	\$1,250,092	\$1,165,437	\$1,149,262	\$1,113,006
Pipestone	\$511,593	\$570,031	\$571,247	\$592,809	\$572,715
Rock	\$767,271	\$896,430	\$825,689	\$847,949	\$825,431

Note: 20 percent of Wind Energy Production Tax paid to counties is distributed to the townships in which wind turbines are located. The above data shows the total allocation.

Forum News Service

The bus must go on

Drivers remain dedicated, diligent following record snowfall; today marks Bus Driver Appreciation Day

By Alyssa Sobotka
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WORTHINGTON — As the work day is just beginning for many, the first shift is ending for a group of men and women dedicated to making sure children arrive safely to school in the morning and to their after-school destination later in the afternoon.



Tim Middagh / The Globe

A Bud's Bus Service school bus stops to drop off students on Clary Street Tuesday afternoon.

And for about half a dozen of Bud's Bus Service bus drivers, parking the bus at the shop after dropping kids off at school is a time to sit back and banter with one another over coffee before heading off to their next destination.

A group of drivers stuck around after their Tuesday morning route and marveled about the record-amount of snow to fall on the area this month. Along with the snow

BUS: Page A5

Erwin pioneers new city position

By Leah Ward
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WORTHINGTON — Josh Erwin describes his new role as Worthington's Community Service Officer/Animal Control Specialist as "a whole new world."

And it is. Erwin's newly created position began on Feb. 4 and is still being defined as he learns his responsibilities.

Erwin's primary role is animal control, which he says is a good fit for him because he loves dogs. When he got his first call, he realized a major concern every time will be, "Is this a friendly dog?" Sometimes the dog is just lost, sometimes it is barking, and sometimes it is dangerous and/or intimidating.



Erwin

Erwin recognizes that many people feel compassion for lost dogs. However, he says it's important that "If you see a dog, don't try to be a Good Samaritan and grab

it." By pursuing a stray dog, a well-meaning person might end up scaring it or stressing it out.

Instead, Erwin encourages people to call the police department's non-emergency line to report a dog that needs help.

His secondary role is to enforce residential ordinances such as

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\$1.50 SINGLE COPY

WEATHER

PARTLY CLOUDY

HIGH 7°
LOW -2°



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GOOD MORNING

Daryl Brunson
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