

## **Plans for offshore wind farm near SPI elicit mixed reaction**

**SOUTH PADRE ISLAND — A wind farm of 500-foot-tall turbines that could power as many as 600,000 homes will be installed about 10 miles offshore of this barrier island, according to information from the Texas General Land Office.**

July 18, 2009

The office announced Thursday that it has reached an agreement with Baryonyx Corp., a Houston-based green energy company, that could turn waters off the island coast into the nation's biggest wind farm.

Baryonyx Corp. was the sole bidder for the right to build a wind farm off the island's eastern shore, GLO spokesman Jim Suydam said. The company will lease the land for \$2.08 per acre and pay as much as 6.5 percent of the production revenue to the state's Permanent School Fund.

The school fund will get a royalty of 3.5 percent of the wind farm's total production through the first eight years, a news release from the GLO states. That percentage increases to 4.5 percent for the next eight years and peaks at 6.5 percent in the 17th year.

A start date for construction has not been determined because Baryonyx, with the signed lease now in hand, must first work out the project logistics, Suydam said.

Among the questions Suydam said he could not answer at this time is whether the giant turbines will be transported to the offshore location by barge or will take an overland route to a nearby site, and whether the project would bring any jobs to the Rio Grande Valley.

The wind farm could be bothersome, however, to Island real estate brokers, developers, fishermen and migrating birds, the founder of a local environmental group said.

"There's a lot more than meets the eye with these projects," said Walt Kittelberger, founder of the Laguna Madre Foundation.

One of the unseen pitfalls of wind turbines is that they kill lots of birds, he said.

But Suydam said he has read research that refutes that.

"All the research I've seen out of Denmark shows that these birds fly over the turbines," Suydam said. "The neotropicals, when they fly their migration, are flying higher than these things."

Kittelberger said research from Germany and Denmark contradicts what really happens.

Because the turbines will be visible from the South Padre Island shores, Kittelberger said, he speculates local brokers and developers could be affected because property values will go down.

But Suydam disagreed, saying Texas has always had a “working coast.”

Although based in Houston, Baryonyx’s owners are from the United Kingdom.

The company also won bids for wind turbine projects off Mustang Island near Corpus Christi and in the Texas Panhandle in Dallam County.

Funding from the Permanent School Fund is distributed by the Texas Legislature, so the money will not go directly to Cameron County schools.

Suydam said most energy produced in Texas stays within the state.