

Wind farm planned off South Padre

Houston company signs lease for 500-foot turbines 10 miles offshore

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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 South Padre Island, according to information from the Texas General Land Office.

The GLO 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 coast, GLO spokesman Jim Suydam said. Baryonyx 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, the release said. That percentage increases to 4.5 percent for the next eight years and peaks at 6.5 percent in the 17th year.

A date to begin construction of the wind farm has not been determined because Baryonyx, with the signed lease now in hand, can begin working out the project logistics, Suydam said.

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

But the project could be bothersome 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 that local brokers and developers could be affected because property values will go down.

But Suydam disagreed, saying that 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 funding will not go directly to Cameron County schools.

Suydam said that most energy produced in Texas remains within the state.