

Blowin' back for more

By Michelle Dunlop | 02/05/05

Wind park developer eyes new projects

HAGERMAN -- If you build it, they will come. Hilde Strawn made her way along the Snake River Canyon from her residence in Mountain Home just to catch a glimpse at the Fossil Gulch Wind Park a few days before it reaches fully operational status. Gazing down the dirt road and up into the sunny, blue sky at a line of windmills, Strawn seemed impressed. "I've never seen anything like that," she said.

By Tuesday the park's seven windmills should be up and running and even more impressive, said James Carkulis, president of Exergy Development Group, the company that built and developed the wind project. "There's a certain elegance to them," Carkulis said. On Friday, crews worked to install fiber optics in each windmill. One of the seven still remained grounded, waiting to be hoisted over the weekend, he said. Each windmill has the capacity to generate up to 1.5 megawatts of power per hour. One megawatt powers about 650 homes for one year.

As construction wraps up at Fossil Gulch, Carkulis has his eye set on future projects in Magic Valley. Exergy intends to develop other ventures in the area to generate an additional 42 megawatts of power. Carkulis said the company doesn't always look at the most obvious sites for its wind parks but tries to take into account the existing land use. He pointed to the Fossil Gulch park as an example. "It's not the most robust wind regime in Idaho," Carkulis said. However, he said, "We haven't displaced anything." The windmills take up about 30 feet in diameter of space in agricultural fields northwest of Hagerman. The fields and crops shouldn't be impacted by the windmills, Carkulis said.

All of the power generated at Fossil Gulch will go to Idaho Power Co., Carkulis said. Not surprisingly then, Strawn wasn't the only visitor to the wind park on Friday. Dennis Lopez, a spokesman for Idaho Power, also toured the site and described the windmills as "magnificent giants." In recent years, the power company has sought to expand its sources for power generation. In 10 years, Idaho Power plans to include 350 megawatts of wind

generated power in its plan. "It will be a good addition to our portfolio," Lopez said. For Exergy and others interested in new wind projects, that's good news.

The development group hopes to add permanent jobs in the area if it establishes other wind farms, Carkulis said. The response to Fossil Gulch bodes well for future development, he said. "We just have had no negative comments from the locals," Carkulis said.

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