

County hoping wind farm is first of many

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GREAT FALLS (AP) — Contractors are piecing together six 380-foot tall wind turbines near the airport here as part of a private wind power project that county officials hope will lead to more wind farms in the area.

The turbines will produce an estimated 9 megawatts of electricity, enough to power about 2,400 homes a year, said developer James Carkulis, president of Exergy Development Group of Helena. The electricity is being sold to Idaho Power Co.

The Horseshoe Bend project is being built on a site less than an acre in size at a gravel pit owned by United Materials.

“This project is important because United Materials and (its board chairman) Bob McIntyre realized that through renewables there was a way to enhance their profitability and contribute to society as far as how energy is produced,” Carkulis said.

Cascade County commissioners hope the Horseshoe Bend project on the western edge of Great Falls will lead to more wind projects in the county.

“We think we can showcase this to attract other wind development in Cascade County,” said Commission Chairwoman Peggy Beltrone. “And it’s a lot easier to sell it when the rotors are turning.”

The county approved the Horseshoe Bend project in March 2004, but work on the turbines themselves didn’t begin until late November with digging the 32-foot-deep foundations.

If the weather cooperates, the six turbines should be online within two weeks, company officials said.

The project had to be approved by the Federal Aviation Administration because it is near Great Falls International Airport. Three of the six turbines will have lights on them.

The turbines here are identical to the nearly 90 turbines at the Judith Gap Wind Energy Center. NorthWestern Energy is buying power from that 135-megawatt wind farm for customers in central and western Montana.

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