

Report: Wind energy costly

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AUSTIN - West Texas legislators and billionaire T. Boone Pickens have long touted wind power as the energy of the future.

In their view, the operation of giant wind turbines in West Texas would be a great source of revenue for landowners, local governments and school districts, and would lower energy costs for consumers.

Equally important, they say, wind energy would make Texas and the nation less dependent on imported oil.

However, on Tuesday a well-known conservative think-tank in Austin threw a bucket of cold water on efforts to make Texas the leader in wind-energy production.

In a 45-page report titled "Texas Wind Energy: Past, Present and Future," the Texas Public Policy Foundation concluded that production of wind energy in the state may cost utility subscribers and taxpayers at least \$60 billion between now and 2025 because of subsidies and tax breaks.

"Wind power is good and should be a part of Texas' energy supply," said Drew Thornley, author of the study. "I am going to be very clear about that today. I am not anti-wind.

"However, Texas policymakers must thoroughly examine both the benefits and limitations of wind energy, particularly the issues of reliability, transmission and cost."

In his view, the Public Utility Commission's recent approval of a \$5 billion plan to connect proposed West Texas wind farms to metropolitan centers is just the beginning of costs that will end up on electric bills.

"These costs do not include escalating labor and material costs or financing costs during construction," Thornley said. "The total cost of transmission construction should increase electricity prices by about \$17.1 billion through 2025."

State Reps. David Swinford and Joe Heflin said they have not read the report but disagreed with its conclusions.

"I don't know what they're talking about," said Swinford, R-Dumas, who has made wind energy a legislative priority. "I need to see their numbers, but I don't think they are correct."

Studies the lawmakers have seen show wind-energy production is beneficial

for all Texans, not just for investors, Swinford said.

In Oldham County, "it will triple the tax base," he said. "For our citizens, their taxes go down because they have a bigger tax base."

Heflin, D-Crosbyton, said he doesn't agree with the conclusions of the foundation's report, either.

"I don't think wind energy is going to be a burden for the consumer," Heflin said.

The foundation's report is available online at www.texaspolicy.com.

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