Written by **James Heiser** on March 9, 2012

Wind Farms Paid to Stop Producing Power

While President Obama travels around the United States touting "green energy" as the solution to the nation's spiraling energy costs, the wind farms of the Pacific Northwest are proving once again that alternative energy sources are having a hard time living up to the praise lavished on them.

According to the UPI, Obama told workers at a truck manufacturing plant in North Carolina: "We've got to develop every source of American energy — not just oil and gas, but wind power and solar power, nuclear power, biofuels." At the same time, the Bonneville Power Administration — a federal agency — has been shutting down wind turbines for hundreds of hours because demand could not keep up with the supply. An article for FoxNews.com ("Wind farms in Pacific Northwest paid to not produce") details the decision to further subsidize wind farms which could only be built with federal funds:

> The problem arose during the late spring and early summer last year. Rapid snow melt filled the Columbia River Basin. The water rushed through the 31 dams run by the Bonneville Power Administration, a federal agency based in Portland, Ore., allowing for peak hydropower generation. At the very same time, the wind howled, leading to maximum wind power production.
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> Demand could not keep up with supply, so BPA shut down the wind farms for nearly 200 hours over 38 days.
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> "It's the one system in the world where in real time, moment to moment, you have to produce as much energy as is being consumed," BPA spokesman Doug Johnson said of the renewable energy.
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> Now, Bonneville is offering to compensate wind companies for half their lost revenue. The bill could reach up to $50 million a year.
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> The extra payout means energy users will eventually have to pay more.

Lacking a means for storing the excess energy produced by the wind turbines, the capacity of the wind farms simply went to waste when the order came down to cease production for hundreds of hours. Unlike coal and oil fired plants, which produce power on a predictable schedule, wind farm production is literally at the mercy of the elements: whether the turbines are functioning at peak efficiency, or at a standstill because of low windspeed, the needs of the market for power fluctuate according to concerns which may have little or nothing to do with the winds driving energy production. Coal, oil and nuclear

plants can fluctuate production to match demand from industry and residential customers, but the wind turbines are ambivalent to such concerns and may overproduce, or underproduce, without concern for economic impact.

It has been known for some time now that wind power falls far short of living up to its reputation for being "green" energy. The problem with wind turbines is not simply one of erratic energy production — the creation of the turbines themselves has led to environmental damage. Mining the raw materials needed for the powerful magnets used in the turbines has led to widespread ecological despoliation in China. As reported for *The New American* in February 2011, the media in the United Kingdom was already documenting the pollution connected with wind power:

> An extensively researched report for the UK's *Daily Mail* reveals one of the apparently-unavoidable byproducts of "green" wind power: a vast lake of toxic, radioactive sludge resulting from the production of the powerful magnets needed at the heart of every wind turbine. Thus far, the absurd contradiction at the heart of the expansion of wind power in the United Kingdom has been hidden from the public, because the pollution is far removed from the eyes of the public: The rare earths needed for making the wind turbines are processed in Mongolia, and it is alleged that corporate interests and environmentalists have either concealed that pollution, or attempted to downplay its effects, to avoid public backlash against the expensive and inefficient alternative energy.

Not only were the turbines built at an appalling cost to the environment, they also proved to be most inefficient when they were needed the most. When the UK suffered from a dramatic drop in temperatures, the turbines came to a stop for the simple reason that the winds ceased to blow:

> According to the *Daily Mail*, the absurd inefficiencies of wind power resulted in the UK's 3,153 turbines producing a mere .2 percent — yes, that's one-fifth of one percent — of the needed power during the bitter cold which blanketed the nation this past December. (Operating at peak efficiency, the turbines should have been able to provide almost ten percent of the needed power, but unreliable winds had the turbines functioning at less than 2.5 percent of their capacity.)

Aside from the controversies related to the manufacture of the wind turbines, and their highly variable level of energy production, wind farms have also generated protests on the basis of their noise generation, and complaints about their aesthetic effect. One wind farm project in the Pacific Northwest is already on hold due to several factors — despite approval from the Governor of Washington. The Associated Press reports that one of the developers admits the wind farm would not be economically viable:

> Opponents of a wind farm on the north side of the scenic Columbia River Gorge say they may appeal Washington Gov. Chris Gregoire's approval of it.
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> Meanwhile, one of the developers of the Whistling Ridge Energy Project in Skamania County says the project is on hold.
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> Jason Spadaro, president of SDS Lumber Co. of Bingen, says he appreciates the governor's approval but that the reduced size of the approved project is not economically viable right now.
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> Washington's energy siting council had recommended that the project be scaled back from 50 to 35 turbines.

With wind farms being paid not to produce, or failing to produce when they are needed, the most

reliable and economically-efficient means of energy production continues to be various forms of hydrocarbon-based energy sources, and nuclear power. As noted in a recent Bloomberg article, 35 percent of the world's energy comes from oil, 30 percent from coal, and 20 percent from natural gas. And, despite Obama's fixation on alternative energy vehicles, the world's supply of oil can continue to meet demand for many years to come. Every dollar spent on non-producing wind turbines is coming directly from the pockets of a public already overburdened with taxation and spiraling energy costs. As reported last fall for *The New American*, new domestic oil production could create a million new jobs by 2018. What is needed is for new production to proceed without interference driven by the ideological agenda which favors inefficient, expensive forms of energy production over proven technologies. Until then, Americans may continue paying wind farms to underproduce.