

## All power go: turbines operating at wind farm

*135 MW if they keep turning ... a tenth of a nuclear plant output suffering 90 towers 260 feet (30 stories) tall.*

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All 90 of the turbines in Montana's first major wind-power project have started operating, harnessing energy at a site about 120 miles southeast of here.

"We're very pleased that it's up and running," said Claudia Rapkoch of NorthWestern Energy. "We think it's a significant addition to the state both in terms of the economic development aspect as well as a further diversification of a fuel source for our customers \_ and a clean fuel source at that."

Power from the 135-megawatt project is sold to NorthWestern Energy, which uses a mix of energy sources to serve customers in central and western Montana. A Chicago company, Invenergy, owns the turbines, bladed towers about 260 feet high.

Three started operating in mid-November and more were running soon afterward. Last week, 80 turbines were running and 10 that had been down for repairs soon were functioning as well, said John Bacon, a manager for Invenergy.

The turbines on some 8,300 acres of state and private land are strategically placed to capitalize on wind patterns. Electricity that is generated enters in the NorthWestern grid system and is fed through a line between Great Falls and Billings.

"The power goes where the demand is, and those are the primary load centers," Bacon said.

Each turbine produces enough power to provide electricity to about 300 homes annually.

"So far there's only been one day that the wind didn't blow," Bacon said. Average wind speed in January has been about 42.6 miles an hour, he said.

All 90 turbines passed a reliability test in December. They are monitored 24 hours a day, with computers in California largely doing the work at night and on weekends. Bacon said 10 people will work at the site when staffing is complete.