



Lake Erie wind power coalition seeks helping hand from Ohio Legislature

By [CHUCK SODER](#)

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The coalition working to put a handful of wind turbines in Lake Erie aims to insert into the hotly contested state budget an amendment that should be the deciding factor in whether the group achieves its goal of building the first wind farm in the Great Lakes, according to Chris Wissemann, managing director of Youngstown-based Great Lakes Wind Energy LLC, one of three companies that would develop and own the wind farm.

The amendment would help the coalition — which includes Lake Erie Energy Development Corp., a nonprofit that represents several government entities and organizations that support the project — attract utilities to buy power produced by the wind farm. That power would be significantly more expensive than power produced by wind turbines on land.

With power purchase agreements, the coalition should be able to raise the money needed to pay for the \$140 million project, Mr. Wissemann said.

The amendment would play off the 2008 state law that requires utilities in Ohio to provide at least 12.5% of their electricity through renewable sources by 2025. Under the law, utilities earn credits toward that goal by generating or buying renewable energy. The amendment in the state budget bill would allow utilities to earn extra credits if they bought power generated by the small offshore wind farm, which would be capable of generating between 20 and 30 megawatts of power.

The pilot project would involve the construction of between five and eight wind turbines in Lake Erie, north of Cleveland, twice as far out as the water intake crib. By clearing regulatory and technical hurdles related to the project, the coalition hopes to spur private developers to build their own wind farms in Lake Erie and throughout the rest of the Great Lakes. The added hope is that these developers would tap the expertise and manufacturing capabilities of companies in Northeast Ohio.

Need for speed

The group wanted to get the amendment into the state budget because it is trying to get it passed as soon

as possible, Mr. Wissemann said. The amendment, which as of this morning had yet to be inserted into a particular budget bill, could "make or break" the coalition's effort to build the first wind farm in the Great Lakes, he said.

Other groups in the Great Lakes region have plans to build their own offshore wind farms. Beating them to the punch would help Northeast Ohio attract attention from private developers, wind turbine manufacturing companies and other businesses that could establish operations here, Mr. Wissemann said.

State legislators have told the coalition that they would support such an amendment because it could spur economic development without requiring added tax dollars, he said. The group has heard some opposition from renewable energy supporters, because giving utilities extra credits for buying offshore wind power would reduce demand for other renewable energy projects, he noted.

"If we take a slice of the pie, there's less pie for everyone else," Mr. Wissemann said.

The three companies that would develop the wind farm are project management firm Bechtel Development Co. of San Francisco, energy development company Cavallo Energy of Houston, and Great Lakes Wind Energy, a group of individual project developers formed to participate in the effort. The group is calling itself Freshwaterwind.

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