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WINDPOWER

Opposition to Windpower:

Lessons from the Trenches

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Evolution of the Opponent

- NIMBY is not new—age-old issue
- Not everyone can be painted with NIMBY label
 - We need to differentiate those with legitimate concerns
- What is new is the coordination and relative sophistication of the opposition movements
 - Internet has been a boon to communicate both legitimate and illegitimate objections
 - High velocity of information exchange makes it difficult to combat all sources
- Developer and industry credibility becomes vital
 - Third-party pro-wind voices become critical

Evolution of the Opponent:

The Environmentalist Who is Anti-Wind

- Despite support from national environmental groups, local chapters often sources of opposition
- Some groups do not allow locals to take formal positions in opposition to national policy but individuals often get engaged
- Most will say “We’re not against wind, just wind in an inappropriate spot—**our** spot”
- “Wind doesn’t make a difference” mantra must be countered
- Information abuse by anti-wind enviros must be challenged w/in environmental community, esp. locally
- Test: Is the opponent really focused on environmental results?
 - ie, is the opponent open to a mitigation plan that would save as many birds offsite as might be killed on-site? If not, I believe they fall into NIMBY category.

What (Usually) Doesn't Work

- Confrontation
- Highly aggressive, in-your-face attacks
- Personal attacks (the "liar" charge)
- Tit-for-tat media blitz
- Playing the victim

What Does Work

- Local champions
 - Key individuals
 - Network of supporters w/ communications plan
 - Availability of pro-wind materials (lawn signs)
 - Hiring of local expertise
 - Local environmentalist support very valuable as counter
- Consistent involvement with the community
- Community benefit funds can be powerful tool, esp if royalty
 - Aligns community interest w/ project
 - Scholarships or comparable support resonates well
- Cooperation with other wind developers in the area on messaging, common issues such as taxes, permits, siting guidelines
- Wind Working Groups education and outreach

What Does Work

- Pre-emptive discussion of issues
 - Concept that we can avoid certain issues by not mentioning them has never worked in the face of opposition
 - » Results in suspicion about motives, veracity
 - Where possible, disclosure of site design can help to mitigate concern, create trust
 - » Downside is alerting opponents and providing ammunition
 - » Can work in Iowa but may not where real opposition exists
- Project website (esp. if kept up to date)
- Good project design
 - Minimizing proximity to non-participating landowners
 - Managing construction impacts to keep traffic, dust, etc. to a minimum

Going Forward

- Tensions that are present at 1000-2000 MW/YR are going to be extreme at 5000-10,000 MW/YR
- NIMBY must have the environmental argument to survive
 - Gives them broader “legitimacy” beyond narrow self-interest
- Anti-wind environmentalists must have NIMBY allies
 - Gives them a local constituency with political clout
- NIMBY will always be with us because few want to sacrifice for a benefit that they may not experience
- “Too good to be true” cynicism creates openness to the idea that wind has a major environmental downside
- Anti-wind soundbites are easy to create, hard to counter
 - Still, must have our own soundbites and must get exposures through media outreach, incorporate into 3rd party messaging (advocacy groups), advertising where feasible

Going Forward

- Developers must learn to cooperate, coordinate messaging
- “Midwind” is a group of large and small Mid-Atlantic developers
 - Share information on anti-wind activities through a listserve
 - Coordinate messaging to ensure consistent issue responses
 - Develop “fact sheets” tailored to local situation
 - Provides ready-made group to support joint action such as research (ie, bats)
 - Conduct media outreach
 - Use a media firm to proactively work local/regional media
 - Make sure reporters call us to get wind’s side of story
 - Funded in six-month increments by members
 - Coordinate with AWEA’s National Wind Coalition and other local advocacy groups
 - Breaks down competitive barriers to industry cooperation

Going Forward

- Industry must “re-brand” itself
 - Wind turbine aesthetic needs to become accepted
 - » Visual representation of cleaner and energy independent America
 - » Need to draw on advertising world, Hollywood, artistic community— “pretty pictures” in lots of places
 - Energy independence appeals to a very broad audience
 - » Advent of plug-in hybrids can cement acceptance of wind’s role in the independence movement



Going Forward

- Pro-wind environmental argument unlikely to sway NIMBYs but we can make it much more difficult for NIMBYs to hijack the environmental message
 - » Many rural areas not driven by environmental issues
 - » Can be countered with a conservation ethic dedicated to creating habitat conditions, often offsite, favorable to birds/bats
 - » Must advance the wind/avian research agenda
 - » Recognize that research agenda is a treadmill that may never end as it can be manipulated—so conservation will play a very important role



Thank You