

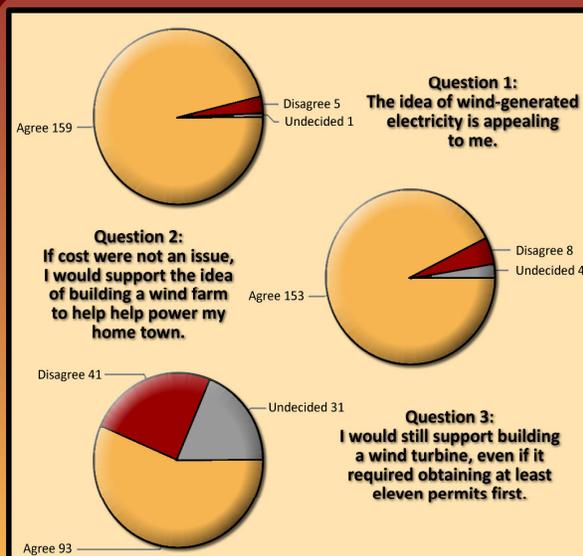
Support and Opposition: The Wind Power Paradox

"It seems, therefore, quite puzzling why it is so hard to succeed in building new wind turbines when people are so much in favour of wind energy."

--Maarten Wolsink, "The NIMBY Myth".†

Abstract

Despite widespread general public support for wind energy projects, proposed wind farms in the United States are frequently fought at a local level and rarely constructed. This study examines four different potential causes of opposition to wind power: economic and technical feasibility issues, environmental consequences, political obstacles, and societal concerns. Through research of existing literature and original interviews and surveys, we establish that economic and technical feasibility have little to do with the success of wind power projects, and that wind turbines have only minimal impact on the environment. The primary reason for prolonged opposition to wind power projects is a widespread lack of understanding of the risks and benefits of wind power, which becomes magnified by an ill-prepared and poorly-designed political process for the construction and operation of wind turbines.



Methodology

1. Research existing expert opinions and data
2. Design survey & interview questions
3. Conduct interview of Save Our Sound Rep.
4. Conduct interview of Greg Lemay
5. Conduct interview of Falmouth Academy
6. Send out survey to WPI students
7. Send out survey to Facebook users
8. Collect, analyze, and graph survey results
9. Create pamphlet with tear-out petition

Conclusions

While opponents of wind power projects often cite various concerns, most of them can be traced back, in one way or another, to an unprepared political system playing off of common misconceptions about wind turbine technology. The survey data backs up this conclusion; it is clear that there is wide general support for wind-powered technology, but as the questions become more specific, the level of support slowly begins to drop. When confronted with political obstacles, the amount of support drops by 37% and the level of indecision increases by 17%. Additionally, more than 40% of those surveyed were concerned that wind turbines would pose a significant threat to birds and bats; most research on the subject finds that the actual danger is negligible. These and other misconceptions combined with a laborious political process create just enough opposition to wind power projects to keep them in litigation for years, eventually causing them to stall out.

* Background Image: US Department of Agriculture, <http://upload.wikimedia.org/wikipedia/commons/b/b3/USDA_windmills.jpg>, Public Domain.

† Wolsink, Maarten. "Wind power and the NIMBY-myth: institutional capacity and the limited significance of public support." *Renewable Energy* 21.1 (2000): 49.