

Law may delay wind project

From Staff Reports

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Wednesday, May 22, 2013

A new state law regulating construction of wind farms in North Carolina could delay but not stop a proposed 89-turbine wind farm planned in northern Camden and Currituck counties, officials said last week.

Gov. Pat McCrory on Friday signed House Bill 484, creating a framework for a new required wind energy permit from the state Department of Environment and Natural Resources.

McCrory said the law will help create a diverse supply of energy while boosting the state's economy. He also believes the measure helps further his "all-of-the-above" energy strategy that includes development of both traditional and alternative sources. McCrory also has urged President Barack Obama to open mid-Atlantic waters to offshore exploration of natural gas and oil.

"This law will help unleash our state's energy resources to power our economy and enable us to harness those resources in a safe, reliable and cost-effective manner," McCrory said in a statement. "Our pursuit of energy from biofuels, clean coal, natural gas, solar, nuclear and wind are part of a prosperous energy future in North Carolina."

The legislation sets parameters for permit applications that include public hearings so opponents can raise concerns. State regulators could deny an application if a project could adversely affect the environment, private landowners or military operations.

The seven-page law requires a "preapplication site evaluation meeting" be held no earlier than four months prior to the application for a permit. It also requires the request to be made no less than six months prior to the filing a permit application.

The site meeting will assess whether the proposed wind energy facility poses a serious risk to military operations.

Camden County County Manager Mike Renshaw said HB 484 may cause energy company Invenergy to delay or even back away from plans to build a \$250 million wind farm at a site in the Hales Lake area.

"Nobody has given up, but I think (the law) could have a serious impact on the project," he said.

The new law requires applicants to take into account the potential impact on military air navigation routes as well as radar.

Naval Station Oceana in Virginia Beach has an outlying landing field in Fentress, Va., and plans to begin practice flights this summer at NASA's Wallops Flight Facility. The Navy also had its eyes set on building an OLF at the Hales Lake site but has shelved any decision on the airfield for the foreseeable future.

One concern has been how the turbines may affect the military surveillance system at the Naval Support Activity Northwest Annex in Chesapeake, Va. The system, called ROTHr, or relocatable over-the-horizon radar, provides wide-area surveillance to military and law enforcement agencies.

In January, Inverenergy Vice President Bryan Schueler sent a letter to both members of Congress representing North Carolina as well as then Gov. Bev Perdue, seeking their support in making sure the wind projects are not negatively affected by the military.

“Wind energy is an important economic development opportunity for all of North Carolina, and can be developed in harmony with existing uses, including extensive military activity and training,” Schueler said in the Jan. 4 letter.

Renshaw said he understands the law was written to protect military bases in North Carolina, but he’s not sure lawmakers fully understood how it would affect Camden.

Inverenergy plans to start construction on an industrial-size wind farm this year.

Inverenergy spokeswoman Alissa Krinsky said the Hales Lake project will produce 145 megawatts of “clean, homegrown renewable energy,” add over \$280 million in capital investment to the tax bases in Camden and Currituck counties, and create about 12 jobs.

“We support North Carolina’s interest in encouraging wind development while protecting the state’s natural, cultural and military resources,” she said. “HB 484 establishes a procedural process at (DENR).”

Krinsky said Inverenergy has found DENR to be a “helpful, responsive resource” as the company develops its project.

“We look forward to continuing to work with DENR, and are hopeful that HB 484 will provide the regulatory clarity necessary to move Hales Lake (wind project) forward.”