

Governor Brownback's Road Map for Wind Energy Policy

by Governor Sam Brownback on Friday, May 6, 2011 at 1:22pm

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Kansans understand and value our state's rich and abundant energy resources. The oil & gas industry has been a storied part of our history while providing the nation with energy supplies. And now Kansas wind is helping power homes across the Midwest.

I have long stressed the importance of maintaining balance between the 3 E's - the Economy, Energy, and the Environment. My announcement today helps achieve that balance. We will continue to encourage the expansion of an unparalleled economic development opportunity that will allow our state to regain its energy exporter status while also protecting an ecological jewel of our state and the nation to be known as the "Tallgrass Heartland" area.

Economy: The first priority outlined in my Roadmap for Kansas is to grow the Kansas Economy. I listed the growth of wind power as a key component of that effort. Development and manufacturing related to wind energy presents an unprecedented economic development opportunity for our state. We have 1,100 MWs of operating wind projects representing roughly \$4 billion in new investment and capable of powering over 300,000 households. More than 1,200 new, high-paying manufacturing jobs have been announced in Kansas in the last eighteen months. Between now and the end of 2012, Kansas is projected to double the amount of operating wind projects. Half of the projects scheduled to come online will be for in-state use. The power generated by the other projects will be exported beyond Kansas. During the next eighteen months of construction, Kansas will see as many as 2,000 new construction jobs, creation of nearly 100 new permanent jobs, tens of millions of dollars of payments to landowners and counties and billions in new investment. We must continue to support policies that encourage this growth to continue.

Continued growth also will hinge upon the expansion of transmission lines that will increase our ability to move energy across the state and allow us to sell energy to the rest of the country. I strongly support the KETA project, the Y-Plan, an initiative to construct a direct current electric transmission line across southern Kansas, and other projects to increase transmission.

Energy: Another key economic growth component in my Roadmap for Kansas is the promotion of affordable energy. I continue to support an "all of the above" energy policy in Kansas. In addition to clean coal, ethanol, oil, nuclear, and natural gas, wind energy plays an important role in providing affordable energy to Kansas citizens and key private sector industries. Increasingly, companies that are considering moving to Kansas want to be able to tell their customers and their investors their new facilities are supported by renewable energy. In addition to being able to provide business and industry with reliable power at a reasonable price, we also can provide them with options to be powered by renewable energy.

Environment: "All things are artificial, for nature is the art of God." During the campaign, I used that quote to explain the beauty of the scenic Flint Hills. I described them as a world class treasure - a landscape not found anywhere else. The tallgrass prairie is our wonder to share with the world. The culture of the farmers and ranchers of the Flint Hills is extraordinarily unique to this region. These are the treasures Central Kansas is so blessed to hold.

Like all treasures, they must be protected. Today, less than four percent of the once-vast tallgrass prairie remains and nearly 80% of what remains lies within the Flint Hills of Kansas and Oklahoma. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has launched a voluntary conservation easement initiative aimed at protecting up to 1.1 million acres of habitat. Later this month, I will host a Governor's Economic Summit on Flint Hills Tourism whereby we will develop a plan to increase eco-tourism to the tallgrass prairie and help promote its preservation.

Since 2005, through a mutually recognized announcement, the State and wind developers have recognized an area previously known as the "Heart of the Flint Hills" to be inappropriate for commercial wind energy development. Because of the unique ecological considerations of the tallgrass prairie, a broad-based coalition of Flint Hills ranchers, preservationists, wind developers, power companies and government officials support the designation of the "Tallgrass Heartland" area to be free from additional commercial wind farm development. The new boundaries are intended to help us maintain an ecologically functioning example of the tallgrass prairie.

The extreme rarity of this last large scale vestige of the tallgrass prairie calls out for extraordinary care and attention. I do not, however, wish to convey a negative message about the future of wind energy in our state. The protected area will not grow again during my administration, nor will I create any additional protected areas. My administration will continue to work with wind developers and wholeheartedly support their activities in other parts of the state. This "Tallgrass Heartland" region designation will not prohibit the construction of necessary electric transmission improvements. Wind farms that are currently under contract to deliver power from projects within the protected area, are of course, expected to fulfill those contracts and will have every opportunity to renew their agreements moving forward. However, they will not be expanded. I have and will continue to support the construction of the Caney River Wind Farm in Elk County.

This plan appropriately balances the 3 E's of the Economy, Energy, and Environment. However, it cannot be successful without the continued voluntary cooperation and support of many others. I am pleased to have the support of many people and groups for my Road Map for Wind Energy Policy