The Vansycle Ridge Wind Farm is Oregon’s first commercial facility to generate electricity using wind. It is located near Pendleton and began operation in November 1998.

**Project Location**

Vansycle Ridge is a crest of land above Vansycle Canyon, which funnels wind from the Columbia River gorge up and over the Horse Heaven Hills in eastern Oregon. The average wind speed at Vansycle Ridge is 16–18 mph, which is considered excellent for wind farm development.

The area around the project’s 38 wind turbines is used mostly for farming. This can continue beneath the completed wind farm, so land-use impacts are minimal; turbines and access roads occupy less than two percent of the area spanned by the project. The site is also close to preexisting transmission lines, which reduced the need to install new cables and minimizes the amount of power lost during transmission.

**Environmental Effects**

The Vansycle wind project was planned carefully and underwent extensive review to minimize its environmental impact. Early biological studies indicated that the site receives little use by birds or other vulnerable species, and the wind farm’s operators continue to monitor the impact of the facility on avian and bat species.

The project uses tubular towers and buried cables instead of lattice bases and pole-mounted cables, in order to avoid adding new perching places for birds. As a clean power source, the project also eliminates some of the need for fossil fuel electric plants in the region. If natural gas or coal were used to generate the same amount of power, they would emit 45,000–70,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year, as well as air pollutants and acid rain precursors. Wind power produces no air emissions.

**Economic Profile**

The Vansycle Ridge Wind Farm is owned by FPL Energy, Inc., a major developer of renewable energy sources in the U.S. Wind power typically costs slightly more than traditional coal and natural gas facilities, but the gap is narrowing every year. The wind farm is operated under a contract with Portland General Electric, which will buy 100 percent of the power for the first 30 years of the project’s life.

The power from the Vansycle project is currently integrated into PGE’s general resource portfolio, but PGE plans to offer it as part of a “green power” option for environmentally-conscious customers beginning in fall 1999.

Like other renewable energy projects, the Vansycle wind farm benefits the local and national economy. It pays royalties to the farmers who own the underlying land, without disturbing their farming practices, and it pays taxes to local governments. It also increases local economic activity by hiring people to build, operate and maintain the wind farm and roads. The project’s turbines were built by Vestas-American Wind Technology, a company based in North Palm Springs, California.