Stateline Wind Energy Center

The Stateline Wind Energy Center is the Northwest’s largest commercial facility to generate electricity using wind. It is located near Touchet, WA and began operating in December of 2001.

Project Location
The Stateline Wind Energy Center is located on Vansycle Ridge, a crest of land straddling the Washington/Oregon border, near Touchet, WA and Pendleton, OR. The ridge catches winds from the Columbia Gorge, which average 16–18 mph; this is considered excellent for wind farm development.

The area around the project is used mostly for private farming, and this will continue beneath the completed wind project. The site is also close to preexisting transmission lines, reducing the need for new cables and minimizing the amount of power lost during transmission. A total of 454 turbines are currently operating in both states. One expansion is proposed for the Washington side, and several are proposed for Oregon; these expansions are currently under review.

Environmental Effects
The Stateline 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. The project uses tubular towers and buried cables in order to avoid adding new perching places for birds. Slower-moving blades and an upwind design further minimize any potential for avian mortality. As a clean power source, the project also eliminates some of the need for fossil fuel electric plants in the region. If natural gas were used to generate the same amount of power, they would emit about 330,000 tons of carbon dioxide per year, as well as air pollutants and acid rain precursors. Wind power produces no air emissions.

Economic Profile
The $300 million wind farm is being built by FPL Energy, Inc., a subsidiary of Florida Power & Light Co. and a major developer of renewable energy sources in the U.S. Wind power typically costs slightly more than traditional coal and natural gas facilities up front, but less in the long run. With today’s volatile fossil fuel prices, wind can be cheaper than natural gas to bring on-line. The wind farm will be operated under a contract with Pacific Power Marketing.

Like other renewable energy projects, the Stateline wind project benefits the local and national economy. It will pay royalties to the farmers who own the underlying land, without disturbing their farming practices, and it will pay taxes to local governments. It will also increase local economic activity by hiring people to build, operate and maintain the wind farm and roads. Construction alone will infuse over $15 million into the local economy, and ongoing maintenance and operations will employ at least 15 permanent staff. The project’s turbines were built by Vestas-American Wind Technology, a company headquartered in Portland, Oregon.