

Pownal family pleased with wind turbine/cell tower

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POWNAL — The wind turbine overlooking Route 7 through Pownal is producing electricity after a long permitting process, said Marilyn Gardner, who lives at the Hill Top Farm where the turbine is located.

Gardner and her husband, Mike, were approached by Verizon three years ago about leasing part of their land for a cell tower. The Vermont Land Trust said that for the tower to be built a working wind turbine had to be installed, she said.

Site work for the tower began in November 2007, and the turbine was switched on in July. She said her family wasn't nervous about the tower going in, as the Nextel company had already put a transmitter in their barn, and that deal had worked out well.

Gardner said she had paid nothing, aside from the postage for the paperwork, to have the tower put up along with the wind turbine. She said power generated by the turbine is counted as credit on their electric bill. She said it produces enough electricity to nearly negate the bill for their house.

Even if the small turbine could give them a surplus of electricity, she said they wouldn't get money from Green Mountain Power because of it.

Gardner said the cost of the tower, the wind turbine, and the maintenance were all handled by Verizon. She said if the company decided to abandon the tower, the cost would fall to the Gardners, assuming they decided to keep the tower in place. If they wanted it removed, the company would pay for the removal.

She said she had no complaints about the tower, not even the slight sound it makes while turning in the wind. "It sounds like water running, it's not a whirring sound," she said, adding she enjoys going up the short access road when the weather is good to read a book near it.

Gardner said she preferred wind power to nuclear power, which she said generated harmful pollution.

Verizon officials, however, are not sold on the idea of combining cell towers with turbines. Having a wind turbine on top of a cell tower can add 30 to 40 feet to the structure, which affects its visual impact, said Richard Enright, director of network system performance for Verizon

Wireless New England. Enright said having a turbine attached to a cell tower involved added electronics that Verizon technicians weren't necessarily familiar with.

Enright said he didn't think the power generated by such turbines made up for the visual impact they have on the landscape, adding that Verizon had no immediate plans to build cell towers, equipped with turbines or otherwise, along Route 9 in Bennington County. He said the nearest project was in Peru at the Bromley Ski Area and at the Okemo Ski Area in Ludlow.

According to Verizon officials, a new cell site has been activated in Windham County.

"The new site increases wireless voice and data coverage and capacity along I-91, Brattleboro Road, Vernon Street, and Fort Bridgman Road in Vernon, Vermont and the surrounding area," according to a Verizon Wireless release.

Enright said he supported wind power, but didn't think the benefit of having a small turbine on a cell tower outweighed the difficulty. "We were asked to do this, so we did it," he said.

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