

# VINEYARD GAZETTE

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## **Citing Need to be Steward, Tribe Explores Wind Turbine Project**

By SAM BUNGEY

Once a month, planner and grantsman for the Wampanoag tribe of Gay Head (Aquinnah) Durwood (Woody) Vanderhoop drives a sport utility vehicle down to the meteorological test tower on Old South Road, at the site of a salvage yard and an abandoned Long Range Radio Navigation (LORAN) tower. Taking care to ground himself by tapping on a piece of plastic at the base of a pylon, he removes a data card containing information which will help determine the tribe's future energy policy.

On a recent blustery fall day the speeds registered by the four tiny windmills reaching up from the salvage yard were up to ten meters per second.

It's the minimum recommended wind speed for a viable wind turbine site.

"I always felt the full responsibility of being good stewards of this land," said Mr. Vanderhoop, point person for the wind initiative. He said conservation is a tribe priority, pointing to the multi-purpose tribal building on Black Brook Road, built in 1993.

"It was designed green before green was in vogue," he said.

The dual role of Mr. Vanderhoop, who has worked for the tribe since 1998, is especially in evidence in his work in wind energy. Currently on his desk is an alert from the Council of Energy Resource Tribes on energy funding news for the tribe. It details the windfall — as it were — from a 2007 Energy Independence and Security Act, which it says would route billions of dollars to energy initiatives for tribes and colleges.

Mr. Vanderhoop's job is to divert as much funding as possible to the tribe project. All work thus far has been covered by grant money.

He said that work began on the possible project back in 2005 when, using a \$50,000 feasibility study grant provided by the Massachusetts Technology

Collaborative, the tribe employed One World Energy, a consulting firm specializing in work for minorities.

The 2005 application for the MTC funding details a wide range of possibilities in terms of project scope.

“It is envisioned that wind turbine(s) ranging from 850 KW to 2.1 MW in size would be well suited to the site and the total project size may range from 1.7 to 6 MW,” the application reads.

The tribe secured the funding but cut ties with One World in 2006 and is currently looking for a new firm to act as partner.

“They were not the right fit for the tribe,” Mr. Vanderhoop wrote in an e-mail this week. “I have a notice out seeking a qualified consultant. I hope to make a decision on a new consultant in early January,” he said.

The MET tower is on loan from Massachusetts Renewable Energy Fund’s Community Wind Initiative. The tower went up in July and Mr. Vanderhoop will take the final reading next June.

The tribe also has a grant of \$82,000 from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Mineral Assessment Program (BIA MAP). Funds from the MAP grant will cover parts of the feasibility study that MTC funds may not.

Mr. Vanderhoop said it is projected the funds will cover a turbine siting analysis, geological studies and transmission studies.

“The funds are fairly flexible,” he said. To date they have been used to complete an engineered site plan for the MET tower.

Mr. Vanderhoop said the scope of any tribe project ranges from nothing to a small turbine to help offset energy needs on tribe land to a much larger, potentially revenue generating project, depending on the MET findings.

He said the tribe’s relatively minor energy needs could be mostly covered by a single mid-sized turbine.

“My vision is that every person consuming energy needs to take some responsibility for that and minimize our impact and become more self sufficient. Whether it’s a money generator or just lessens our impact,” he said.

He hopes to complete the feasibility study by next August. Beyond that he makes no predictions.

“It’s kind of a long ways off,” he said.

In terms of numbers, Mr. Vanderhoop feels less will be more.

“My thought is that if we’re going to do something better to have larger and fewer rather than four, five or ten smaller towers,” he said.

Mr. Vanderhoop is in contact with tribes across the U.S. and in Canada to compare methods on energy development. He is among the tribal council members pushing for legislation for the formation of a separate corporate entity for the tribe to handle business.

“We want a corporation which is qualified and moves at the pace of business,” he said.

He cited a recent Harvard research program of American Indian Economic Development that concludes profitability is twice as likely for tribe projects pursued by a separate corporate board.

So with well-publicized wind projects across the Island in various early stages of development, the tribe project may be the best situated to move quietly and speedily forward.

Meanwhile both the town and tribe are pursuing their own potential revenue generating projects — though town efforts to date are mired in miscommunication and legal bureaucracy. Aquinnah’s 396 residents currently receive electricity via cabling installed in 1957 — the potential effect on the old cabling meant to service a small community is unclear.

“Our consultants had made some contact with NStar, but there was no report produced on their findings that I can reference,” said Mr. Vanderhoop. “Feeding power from any site to the power grid will be a challenge if there is a desire to pursue a large-scale turbine.”

The tribe, which is a sovereign nation but must follow state and local zoning laws for land use projects, may also have to clear town permitting hurdles.

How this would play out in a permitting process for one or several wind turbines is unclear. The Aquinnah town land use bylaw currently makes no provisions for structures above 24 feet. The argument could be made that the tribe has to wait until specific regulations governing structures as high as a wind turbine are in place, said town administrator Jeffrey Burgoyne, though he added that it is a murky area.

Mr. Vanderhoop clearly recognizes many hurdles in the process but appears confident about the tribe’s eventual energy prospects.

“This will put us in better control of our resources,” he said.

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