A blow to wind energy

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My local paper says that the wind energy business is likely to slow down in 2013 [1]. They explain that it will be bad for a local manufacturer that makes parts for the turbines and who also makes machines to make the parts. When you make 10 ton hubs for the turbines it is best to make them as close to the installation site as possible. Otherwise the shipping costs can ruin your profits.

Wind does have a few problems. For one thing it is not dispatchable. What does that mean? It means the grid operator can't give the wind boys and girls a call and say: "I need an extra 100 megawatts for an hour. Can't you supply it?" If you are a wind farm operator the best you can say is, "I'm not sure." Because if the wind isn't blowing you can't cover any of that. If the wind speed varies the amount of that 100 megawatt load you can cover is going to vary. At least until we get cheap storage for the energy the turbines collect.

How about Black Start capability? [2] The ability to restart a plant with no available incoming power. The problems of the Black Start are especially acute after a disaster. Well you can use on site back ups like diesels. If they are working. Some times they are not. And if the wind isn't blowing...

And another thing. You hear all the time about what the turbines are capable of under the best of conditions. Their name plate rating. But what about the name plate rating vs deliverable power? And because wind is not predictable on local time scales it requires hot backup. You have to keep the motors (steam generators mostly) on idle so they can race to catch up with any shortfall. And cut back quickly in case of an over abundance. Some times the economics are so bad and the subsidies are so good that the wind folks will pay the power distribution companies to take the power off their hands.

And then there is the cost of wind per MW hr with the subsidy included. Without the subsidy - fuggedaboutit. And it looks like the forgetting [3] will be happening soon. The tax credits for "alternative" (read unreliable) energy have not been renewed. What was that again? Renewables have not been renewed? Isn't that a contradiction in terms? There is a simple explanation.

Wind power does not succeed by capturing wind. It succeeds by capturing government.

M. Simon's e-mail can be found on the sidebar at Space-Time Productions [4].

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