



## **Chaplin Wind Farm**

### **Wind-energy projects needed – but not just anywhere**

**By: Joe Schmutz, SES Volunteer Representative**

The conservation community had been abuzz for months with rumours of an ill-planned wind-energy project. The project's location north and west of Chaplin would have placed it squarely amidst five high priority bird-conservation areas. Some are considered so valuable that they'd gained international stature.

The conservation community breathed a sigh of relief and applauded Minister Scott Moe and his Ministry of Environment staff when the wind-energy proposal was rejected for this location on 13 Sept. 2016. How did this all happen?

Maps of wind potential in southern Saskatchewan show good wind virtually anywhere in the neighbourhood of 7 metres per second. Chaplin, according to one map, includes a higher potential and was then chosen in the absence of any broader environmental, economic and social sustainability considerations. A 177 MW project was proposed with 79 turbines by Windlectric Inc., a subsidiary of Algonquin Power Co. of Oakville, ON. Algonquin already owns and operates projects in Saskatchewan, including 16 turbines near Moosomin, 63 near St. Leon and 10 near Morse. SaskPower had selected Windlectric Inc. from among 26 proposals and signed an agreement. Windlectric Inc. contracted Stantec Consulting Ltd. to prepare an environmental assessment and field surveys began in 2012.

Conservationists and even enthusiastic proponents of wind energy are well aware of the thorny issue of bird mortalities arising from collisions with wind turbines. Saskatchewan's eight species of bats are similarly vulnerable, with one estimate yielding 11.6 bats killed per megawatt of capacity per year. Another problem with the Chaplin location arises from the high densities of migrant birds that frequent this area. Bird surveys for the 1980s and 1990s show that an estimated 78,000 migrant birds use Chaplin Lake in a year. The counts for Old Wives Lake are even higher, 86,000, and these too migrate through the Chaplin area. Many of these species are shorebirds that migrate from as far as Central and even South America to breed in the Canadian Arctic. Because of their small size, these shorebirds cannot store energy for long flights as the larger ducks and geese can. The shorebirds depend on the Chaplin and Old Wives lakes as 'stop-over' sites to feed and replenish energy reserves on migration. These saline lakes, especially Chaplin, are enormously biologically productive. In addition to shorebirds, 40% of the proposed turbines would've been located on native prairie. Studies have shown that not only do native prairie birds get struck by rotors, they also avoid areas where turbines operate.

Responding to concern, the Ministry of Environment first invited responses from the public.

The Ministry then invited respondents to participate in a consultation on the Chaplin Wind Energy's fate and finally another consultation to formulate



guidelines to be used in the selection of future wind projects that will be encouraged.

SES submitted a response to the Ministry's invitation and suggested moving the project to a less damaging location, or seriously scaling back on the number of turbines to be installed. SES's response highlighted our experience with community conservation planning for Chaplin, Old Wives and Reed lakes, and Important Bird Areas. SES also participated in the consultation on wind-energy siting guidelines. These guidelines now aim to avoid or minimize risks arising from collisions, from species at risk in general, and from habitat loss and disturbance.

This project should never have reached a stage where so much effort had been devoted by the proponent, the Rural Municipality, the landowners and the local community in general.

We believe that much has been learned by this initial failure, and the Ministry of Environment deserves to be applauded for the steps taken, even if they came late. One can trust that future such conflicts can be lessened or avoided by what Saskatchewan has learned in the process.

We believe that our measured SES voice much in favour of renewable energy but not in favour of ill-conceived renewable energy was heard. Of all the organizations that were present, SES could and did present this view loudly and clearly. After all, SES has a successful renewable energy project of its own supported by our members and others in Saskatoon, the SES Solar Co-operative Ltd. We shared this SES success and voiced the view that wind energy is a much needed partner to solar initiatives toward a smart and integrated vision for energy for the people of Saskatchewan today and tomorrow.

*\*\*\*SES thanks members Joe Schmutz and Peter Prebble for taking the lead on this initiative.*