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Another Voice: Facts don't support putting wind turbines on our lakes

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By Steve Royce

I have to disagree with many of the comments made by the conservation chair of the Atlantic Chapter of the Sierra Club in [Tom Prohaska's Sept. 5 article](#) about renewable energy.

The assertion that public voices will still be heard under Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo's new Office of Renewable Energy Siting is not accurate. The very point in establishing this new agency was to make sure his renewable policy is advanced despite opposition from the public and affected municipalities. Voices may be heard, but the outcome will be predetermined.

In that same article was an assertion that those who argue that their voices won't be heard are "opposed to renewable energy." Again wrong. The right solar, wind or hydroelectric project in the right location, with proper regard for the environment, ecology and public health, would be widely welcomed.

Next was the claim that disruption to the lake beds resulting from installation of turbines in lakes Erie and Ontario would be minimal, and would rely on turbines mounted on concrete slabs sitting on the floors of the lakes. NYSERDA's Draft Supplemental General Environmental Impact Statement report of June 11, 2020, states that winter ice represents a major problem in siting turbines in the lakes. Simple concrete slabs would not keep the turbines from being ripped away.

However, a quote regarding wind turbines in lakes Erie and Ontario was the most indicative of many people's misunderstanding of the impact of wind turbines in eliminating electrical generation from fossil fuels.

"I wouldn't want 100 of them, but spread out across the lake, a modest number of them could really replace a lot of filthy gas-burning plants," said the Sierra Club representative.

If 100 is too many, let's assume 70 is an acceptable "modest" number. Available wind turbine technology that can be transported to the lakes is currently limited to about 4 megawatts.

Again, let's assume that advances in technology will make it possible to transport turbines of 6 megawatts to the lakes in the near future. So, 70 times 6 is 420 megawatts. However, because wind is an intermittent and variable resource, one might expect a capacity factor of no greater than 55% for offshore wind. And, 420 megawatts times 55% is 231 megawatts.

One modern gas turbine used in a combined cycle generating plant can generate up to 570 megawatts reliably, not dependent on an unreliable fuel source such as the wind. So, how many gas-burning plants could be eliminated with the "modest" scenario? The 231 megawatts from wind divided by 570 for a gas turbine equals 0.40 plants. That doesn't sound like "a lot of filthy plants" to me.

Steve Royce, a retired engineer, is a member of the Save Ontario Shores Energy Committee.