

Billboard campaign calls on Gov. Cuomo to protect Falls air base



The message to Governor Andrew C. Cuomo is loud and clear: “Don’t let Apex gamble with our air base.”

Purchased by Save Ontario Shores (SOS), billboards featuring a massive industrial wind turbine and an Air Force KC-135 tanker are posted near the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station (NFARS), Niagara County’s largest employer.

Virginia-based Apex Clean Energy has proposed construction of as many as 70 industrial wind turbines in the towns of Somerset and Yates in Niagara and Orleans counties. The massive turbines would reportedly be more than 620 feet tall, making them the tallest turbines on land in the U.S. and the highest structures in New York State outside of New York City.

Residents and property owners who make up SOS share a deep appreciation for the unspoiled beauty of Somerset and Yates and the shoreline of Lake Ontario; their goal is to protect the rural environment, wildlife, the economy and its citizens by opposing the industrial wind turbine project.

Surveys show most residents are opposed to the construction of the wind turbines.

“We know military officials are pushing for another base realignment and closure (BRAC) process, and the presence of these massive structures so close to the Niagara Falls Air Reserve Station could eliminate its current encroachment-free status, placing the base at risk,” said Pamela Atwater, SOS president.

In two previous BRACS's, NFARS had been scheduled for closure, only to receive an eleventh-hour reprieve.

Atwater noted that earlier BRAC's have resulted in the closing of seven other military installations in New York. "I'm sure Governor Cuomo does not want to see any base closures on his watch. We urge him to ask Apex to withdraw its Lighthouse Wind proposal to protect NFARS, its 2,600 jobs and \$200 million annual economic impact on Western New York," Atwater said.

Fort Drum, a U.S. Army post near Watertown, is confronting the same situation. Apex has proposed 30 industrial wind turbines towering to nearly 600 feet in that rural area of New York.

Julie A. Halpin, a spokeswoman for Fort Drum, told the *Watertown Daily Times*, the proposed Apex project "would have an impact on radar as it increases the clutter on the scope." She also said the industrial wind turbines could have a negative impact on aircraft instrument approaches to Fort Drum and to its air traffic control services.

Legislation limiting construction of industrial wind turbines near U.S. military installations is currently being considered in Albany and Washington.

Congressman Chris Collins of New York introduced the "Protection of Military Airfields from Wind Turbine Encroachment Act" to ensure that any new wind turbines located within a 40-mile radius of a military installation will be deemed ineligible for renewable energy tax credits. Senator John Cornyn of Texas has proposed a companion bill in the U.S. Senate.

Comparable legislation has been introduced in New York by Senator Rob Ortt of North Tonawanda.

In Texas, the legislature approved a bill to eliminate tax abatements for wind turbines sited within 25 miles of military bases, over concerns they pose a safety risk to bases with aviation operations. State lawmakers in North Carolina and Virginia have also expressed concerns regarding the proximity of industrial wind turbine plants to military installations.