

Keeping the Communication Pipeline Open

CONSUMERS ENERGY'S PROACTIVE EFFORTS of informing the farm community about a proposed \$636 million Saginaw Trail Pipeline is drawing rave reviews from at least one agricultural leader.

Jim Byrum, Michigan Agri-Business Association president, applauded Consumers Energy for having face-to-face meetings, sending letters and post cards to landowners and local government and safety officials notifying them of the project.

The proposed pipeline will span 94 miles and be installed from Saginaw to New Hudson just north of I-96. If approved, the company plans on starting the five-year project this summer.

The project is necessary to enhance safety and reliability for natural gas customers.

"Our organization, the Michigan Agri-Business Association, has seen Consumers Energy step up to the plate in recent years when it comes to serving the needs of agricultural users with communication, innovation and

helping with new developments, both on the farm and with businesses," said Byrum in the letter.

Byrum also credited the energy provider with launching a new natural gas compressor in Michigan's thumb, "ensuring that adequate natural gas will be available to power grain dryers throughout the region."

"This was a direct response to agriculture identifying a need, and Consumers finding a solution, as is the new pipeline project in central Michigan," Byrum wrote. "We need more natural gas capacity, and Consumers is working with this project and others to meet the needs of agriculture and other industries."

Byrum went on to write that Consumers Energy cares about the farmers it serves.

"Consumers is also engaged with our industry in a robust conversation about Michigan's energy future, and we meet regularly to discuss the needs of agriculture as it relates to not just natural gas, but also electricity."

Powering Michigan's Energy Future Energy Park in Mason County Set for Expansion

WE ARE TAKING ANOTHER step to increase our renewable energy portfolio while boosting the state's economy by the end of this year.

We expect to break ground on Cross Winds® Energy Park II in Tuscola County this year. The project will add 19 turbines capable of generating up to 44 megawatts of clean, renewable energy for our customers.

During peak construction of Cross Winds Phase II, we expect to hire up to 100 construction employees. There will also be an economic boost to the local economy with tax revenue and additional payments to landowners once the wind farm is in operation.

"The special land use permit we secured also gives us the option to build a third phase in the future," said Dennis Marvin, Community Engagement Manager. "We expect future phases of Cross Winds to be an additional economic boost to the area."

The Cross Winds project, in operation since 2014, is producing up to 111 megawatts of renewable electricity using 62 wind turbines.

Perhaps the most important benefit of the original project: the wind farm created about 150 construction jobs and eight permanent jobs.

There is also a Lake Winds® Energy Park in Mason County, which began operation in 2012. Collectively the two projects have produced more than 200 MW of electricity.

As part of our commitment to Pure Michigan Business Connect – adding \$5 billion into the economy over the next five years – more than \$110 million invested into the original Cross Winds and Lake Winds came from goods and services supplied by companies in Michigan. This included turbine manufacturer and construction contractors, subcontractors and other services.

"We continue to be committed to the communities we serve," Marvin said. "We appreciated working with Columbia Township officials and all of our landowners and other supporters to secure our permit and look forward to making the project a reality later this year."

Caretaker of the Wind Parks



CHRIS MCNALLEY SEES different challenges every day, when on the job as a turbine engineer at both Cross Winds and Lake Winds Energy Parks.

“Many different challenges appear in a typical day that I don’t mind tackling head on,” said McNalley. “Whether I’m analyzing turbine operational data for equipment behavior or trying to find better components and refine processes to improve the way our team operates. Everything I do has one final result in mind: making sure every turbine is operating safely and at high performing level at both wind parks.”

McNalley said he’s grateful for the opportunity he’s been given and the team he works with. “I really do feel blessed,” he said. “Sometimes I still stop in amazement when I’m looking up at the turbines and realize I have the opportunity to get to work on and maintain these huge machines that are important to our company’s renewable energy future.”

McNalley recently took some time to talk about the positives and challenges of working on the two wind parks.

Q: What’s a typical day like for you?

Chris McNalley: It depends on the needs of the wind fleet. When I am at the office, I typically start off by starting up both Lake Winds and Cross Winds Supervisory Control and Data Acquisition systems at both wind parks, monitoring and reading the day ahead reports to understand any downtime information. I then address current issues related to troubleshooting and coordinate with our Operation and Maintenance (O&M) teams, including ordering parts and performing data analysis functions to be proactive in resolving anything that affects our reliability. If I’m in the field at Cross Winds or Lake Winds Energy Parks, I’ll typically start the day talking to our wind specialists to see what is going on currently with equipment, if there is anything we can do to improve safety, reliability and productivity in the Operation

and Maintenance process. There’s always something to improve on.

Q: What do you like most about the job?

Chris McNalley: I’m a very mechanical person and I would consider myself a gear head (car guy). I really like working on the various mechanical, electrical and control systems on both the wind turbines and our photovoltaic solar equipment (Solar Gardens). A large part of maintaining and improving the reliability of the equipment is understanding how it functions, hands-on and working through issues with other team personnel.

Q: What is the job’s biggest challenge?

Chris McNalley: The job’s biggest challenge is continuously working to operate and maintain 118 wind turbines. That’s a large number of blades, gearboxes, generators and other components to keep operating. Our team does an excellent job performing the work in a very safe and productive manner.

Use Eyes and Ears as Guide Instead of Auto Steer

CONSUMERS ENERGY reminds farmers not to fully rely on auto steer on their farm equipment and to let their eyes and ears be more of a guide.

Sometimes farmers relying on auto steer to drive their equipment will get preoccupied and don’t see a pole or other large objects in their path. A collision is not only unnecessary; it could lead to expensive damage to the equipment and/or severe injury to the person operating in it.

“We caution operators that they need to be aware of their surroundings while operating farm equipment,” said Jim Baisden, manager of Consumer Energy’s Agricultural Services

department. “Even though you aren’t steering the equipment, don’t take a chance by fiddling with your phone or doing something that distracts you. Over the past several years there have been several incidents when the farm equipment operator has run into power poles while using auto steer.”

Baisden said there is nothing more important than one’s safety.

“At Consumers Energy, it’s our goal each day to make sure we send our employees home to their families safe each and every day,” he said. “We also want to remind the public of taking certain steps – no matter their job – to go home the same way they came to work that day.”

New Energy Law Enacted

A MICHIGAN ENERGY POLICY recently passed that will put customers first while giving energy providers the chance to increase their renewable energy portfolio.

“It took a lot of effort and many voices, but the Legislature listened and established a policy that will provide our customers with affordable, reliable and increasingly clean energy for years to come,” said David Mengebier, Senior Vice President of Governmental, Regulatory and Public Affairs.

Multiple rounds of debate with legislators, local organizations and key stakeholders created a solid law – recently signed by Gov. Rick Snyder – that will:

- Maintain the 10 percent cap on Retail Open Access (ROA). However, if customers start coming back to the utility and the ROA load drops below 9 percent, then the cap goes down 1 percent at a time, respectively.
- Implement commonsense reforms that ensure all suppliers have sufficient electricity supply for their customers for at least two years in advance.
- Ensure competitiveness and transparency by establishing a process to ensure each new major utility investment is the best choice for utility customers compared to any alternative options.
- Increase the amount of renewable energy utilities use as part of their supply from 10 to 15 percent by 2021.
- Require electricity suppliers to provide programs where customers can purchase all of their supply from renewable energy sources.



For additional information on Michigan’s new energy law, visit legislature.mi.gov.



New Website

Consumers Energy launched a new Agricultural website that addresses the energy needs of farmers around Michigan. Please visit ConsumersEnergy.com/farm

Consumers Energy

Count on Us®

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Some of our services include:



New farm service requests or upgrades



Free stray voltage electrical inspections



New natural gas service requests



Advising clients on equipment needs

For more information about agricultural services visit ConsumersEnergy.com/farm or call 800-252-8658