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### Governor pushes wind power in plan

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Gov. Rod Blagojevich on Monday formally launched his plan to make wind power a required part of the state's energy makeup, a requirement that could spawn a "wind farm" boom in the Metro East area and across the state. Blagojevich, who has previously said he would push for a renewable energy requirement for Illinois power companies, filed a proposal Monday with the Illinois Commerce Commission that would require Illinois utilities to use 8 percent alternative power sources by 2012. Wind-powered turbines -- modern versions of the windmill -- would comprise the bulk of it.

Major utilities have backed the plan, though one industry spokesman warned Monday that the state currently doesn't have nearly enough turbines to allow those companies to meet the requirements. The ICC sets regulations for Illinois utilities. Blagojevich's announcement of his proposal to the ICC was accompanied by statements of support from Commonwealth Edison and Ameren Corp., Illinois' two largest electric utilities. Blagojevich's plan would require electricity suppliers for Illinois customers to use 2 percent renewable energy by next year, with that increasing by 1 percentage point each year to 2012, to 8 percent. Of that 8 percent, three-quarters would have to be generated by wind power. "While our energy needs continue to grow, we remain dependent on imported energy sources such as coal and natural gas to power our homes and businesses," Blagojevich said in a written statement. ". . . Boosting our use of clean, renewable, home-grown energy will put Illinois on a path toward greater energy security." In his State of the State speech this month, Blagojevich presented wind power as a way to achieve cleaner energy while boosting Illinois' economy by enticing companies to "harvest" wind, a plentiful crop in the state's flat midsection.

Under the plan, utilities, which now get most of their power from a mix of coal, gas and nuclear power, would add wind to the mix, buying that power from Illinois "wind farms" -- fields of towering turbines that turn in the wind to produce and transmit energy.

The administration estimates the plan could generate \$2 billion in new investment and 2,000 construction jobs, as the industry rushes to refit itself toward wind-harvesting.

In fact, the state would almost need to build a wind industry from scratch to meet the proposed standards. Illinois currently has just a handful of operational or soon-to-be-operational wind farms, including projects at Mendota, north of Bloomington; Bureau County, east of the Quad Cities; and Pike County, northwest of St. Louis.

The state's whole wind-energy output, one industry official estimated, is currently about 100 megawatts of power -- a sliver of the 3,000 megawatts the Blagojevich administration wants Illinois utilities to be plucking out of the wind by 2012.

"That's a lot of megawatts," said James Monk of the Illinois Energy Association, which represents the state's utilities. "You're talking about building a lot of windmills to get us to that percentage." Monk predicted that, when the final rules are fleshed out, they will have to allow flexibility for utilities to buy some of its wind power from outside Illinois.

Pike County is among the latest entries to the state's wind-power industry, with one turbine under construction there in connection with a rural electric cooperative.

But at least one Missouri company has been eyeing the Pike County region for the possibility of investing heavily there in wind, should the new standard be approved by the ICC.

"This is very good news," said **Kent Schien**, president of **Innoventor Inc.**, an engineering company in Maryland Heights that has been studying the wind along a 15-mile ridge through Pike and Adams counties. The company is considering developing a 200-turbine wind project there, the idea being to sell that power to utilities.

Schien said more than a dozen states nationwide have or are considering renewable energy requirements, "and those states are where all the development is" in wind-power technology.

An ICC rule requiring wind-power use by utilities "would accelerate our plans. That's just a given," Schien said. "It would accelerate everyone's plans."