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Echols: Georgia has a 'good start' using wind energy

Phil W. Hudson Staff Writer- Atlanta Business Chronicle [Email](#) | [Twitter](#) | [LinkedIn](#) | [Facebook](#) In May, Atlanta Business Chronicle reported the Georgia Public Service Commission signed off on Georgia Power Co.'s plan to buy 250 megawatts of power produced by two wind farms in Oklahoma, enough electricity to run more than 50,000 homes. Navigant Research said recently that wind power will deliver 7.3 percent of the electricity consumed worldwide by 2018.

On July 29, the Chronicle spoke to Public Service Commissioner Tim Echols about wind energy in Georgia.

Q: What role do you see for wind energy in Georgia? Georgia's wind speeds are weak at best with today's current wind technologies. Getting these great deals where the wind speeds are more sustained is a much better deal for our ratepayers. We don't risk construction overruns or weather-related issues because our contract is for firm energy regardless of whether the wind is blowing or not.

Q: What percentage of Georgia's energy supply comes from wind? Right now in 2014, we have zero wind energy. The 139 windmills we have contracted for 20 years will produce only a tiny fraction of our energy. But it is a good start and creates savings for our ratepayers.

Q: What challenges does wind energy face? In Georgia, the challenge will always be sustained wind speeds. We would really have to go offshore even to approach the speeds of the Oklahoma wind but offshore wind would be at significantly higher cost than onshore-Midwest wind.

Q: Georgia seems to have a number of companies generating wind energy. Is that an asset to the state? We have dozens of wind-related businesses in our state, and I think we have the opportunity for more. Because these wind turbine parts are so big, the Savannah area has great opportunity to attract wind manufacturing companies who need direct access to those ships. Also, the Southeast remains an attractive manufacturing region due to the lower electricity rates and strong workforce development programs.

Q: Are there tax credits available for companies and/or individuals that use wind energy? It is because of the federal production tax credits that we see so much wind in states like Oklahoma. Unfortunately, those tax credits expired at the end of last year. No one knows for sure if Congress will continue those, but if they do we'll continue to see wind energy develop.

Q: Will we have wind energy produced in Georgia or to use in Georgia? We approved a small demonstration project of four wind turbines last summer. Those will be the first units to go up in the next year or so. Georgia Power is also planning to issue a request for information later this year to survey the market, hoping to find other cost-saving projects like the Oklahoma sites approved earlier this year.

Phil W. Hudson is a finance, banking and general assignment reporter.