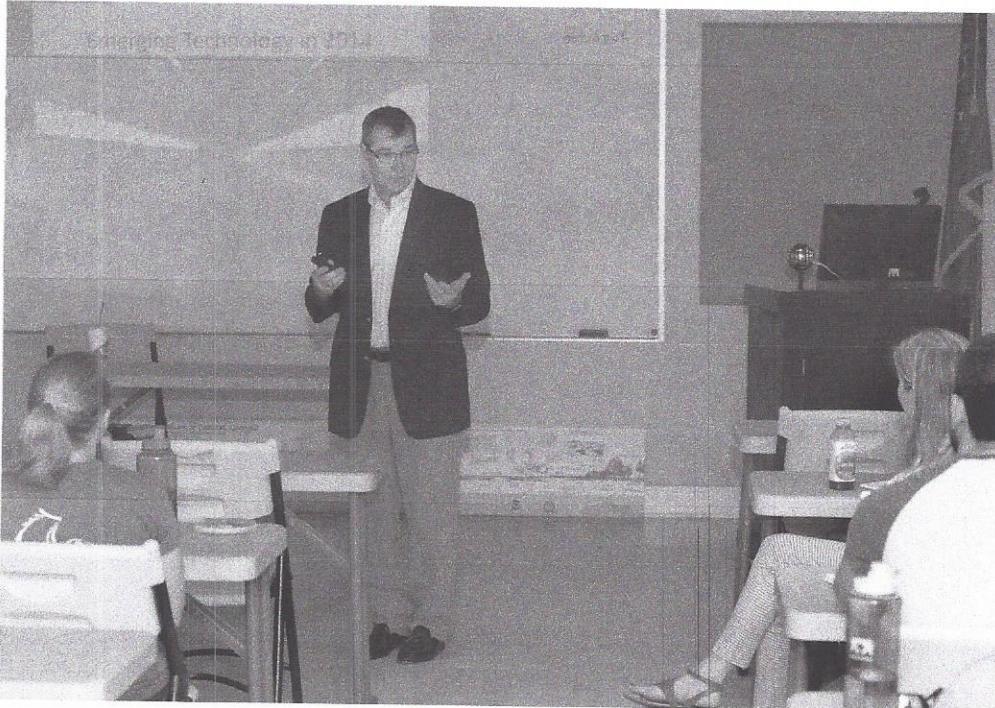


Wind energy could come to the Isles

By LINDSEY ADKISON ladkison@goldenisles.news Apr 6, 2017



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Tim Echols, the Georgia Public Service Commissioner, addresses the crowd at a lunch and learn Wednesday at the DNR's coastal headquarters.

Brunswick is looking to the future in a number of ways. One of those is in terms of power.

Tim Echols, Georgia's public service commissioner, was on hand Wednesday during a lunch and learn event held at the Department of Natural Resource's Coastal Regional Headquarters in Brunswick to discuss what lies ahead.

In the Golden Isles, the near future of power could include wind turbines on Colonel's Island, he said. It began when a joint project between the state, Georgia Power and other educational entities were looking to try out four experimental turbines on Skidaway Island.



But once the groups were on site, they discovered the soil was not going to cooperate. Instead of immediately giving up, Echols decided to look at one other location.

"Right up the Brunswick River on the back side of Colonel's Island, at the Mercedes facility. I met with the head of Mercedes in North America and he authorized Georgia Power to go ahead and do the site work to see if it is suitable," he said.

"There's some pine trees there and some of those would have to come down. But that would be space enough for four wind turbines. One of those would be two stories high, one three stories and another four stories ... different heights."

If all goes well, Echols is optimistic the turbines could be built, bringing more ecological and affordable energy to the area. Mercedes simply wanted an assurance that the turbines would not interfere with the business of loading and unloading cars.

Echols had his own stipulation as well.

"My only stipulation was (for) school groups. I want them to be able to see this because we really don't have any other working wind power other than Hiawassee that an educational group can go out and see this. We need to help our kids learn about various types of energy," he said.

While no ruling has been issued yet, Echols is hopeful the turbines will come to fruition. Wind power is the wave of the future when it comes to natural energy, he said.

"Georgia Power will contract to test the sand to make sure we don't have the same problem as Skidaway," he said. "Let's keep our fingers crossed. Hopefully we will hear something soon. I would think by summer we'd hear something about this."

Wind power was not the only subject touched on during Echols' visit to the Golden Isles. He also mentioned a growing solar farm near the Brunswick Golden Isles Airport as a benefit to the citizens.

"First and foremost, it is cheap energy. It wasn't always that way ... five or 10 years ago it was very expensive but now it is a cheap form of energy," he said. "Rate payers benefit because the cost of this power that Georgia Power is procuring is below the avoided cost of energy."

On his watch, the state has moved from number 34 in the nation to number four in terms of approved solar energy, Echols said.

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It is an upward trend he plans to continue. Echols shared statistics and experiences of various areas throughout the state, showing how different areas have embraced solar power. He also noted challenges the energy source faces and ways to market to specific consumer groups.

He also mentioned ongoing troubles with Plant Vogtle near Augusta. The facility has been expanding and has faced challenges, especially concerning two new nuclear units. A key contractor, Westinghouse Electric, recently filed for bankruptcy. State and Georgia Power officials are currently evaluating the best course of action.

"This is a very serious matter for our state because we've invested already a couple of billion dollars. All the cities are co-owners so basically every single customer is vested in this with a few exceptions. We've got about 24 more days to find out if Westinghouse going to abandon the project," he said.

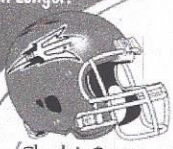
"There are like 50 different construction projects on one site. It's 6,000 workers. It is a mammoth project. Their burn rate on money is \$102,000 million a month."

Echols said the state and Georgia Power must look at other avenues to move forward. Some of those include finishing the site or converting it to a natural gas tank for \$1 billion. The final option is to abandon the project.

"I don't think there are any of those scenarios where the rate payers come out better than the fixed contract Georgia Power had initiated with Westinghouse," he said.

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