

## DEBATE

# Wind Turbines in Lake Erie?

If approved, Icebreaker would become the first freshwater wind farm in North America. The six-turbine, 150 million pilot project — to be located 8 miles off the coast of Cleveland — inched closer to a green light last fall when a requirement that the wind farm stop operating at night from March until November was dropped. Proponents hail Icebreaker as a unique opportunity to bring jobs, economic activity and clean energy to Ohio. Critics say it's a gateway to thousands of wind turbines in Lake Erie, which would blight our horizon, threaten migrating birds and raise energy costs. We checked in with two people on differing sides of the issue to learn more: Dave Karpinski is the president of the Lake Erie Energy Development Corp., the nonprofit coalition behind Icebreaker. John Lipaj is a board member for the Lake Erie Foundation, a nonprofit founded in 2016 to sustain and protect Lake Erie. — COLLEEN SMITEK

*Why (or why not) is Lake Erie the right place for this project?*

**LIPAJ:** Lake Erie Foundation supports clean energy. However, we cannot support this project to industrialize our great lake by building these wind turbines. Lake Erie is Ohio's most precious natural resource. In addition to providing drinking water to 11 million people, Lake Erie is our region's greatest natural attraction. The Lake Erie anglers, boaters, vacationers and property owners aren't being heard. We believe it is vitally important for Ohioans to know the potential long-term impact of this project. We are concerned for many reasons, and our greatest resource shouldn't be used as a profit-generating experiment for a multinational corporation. Icebreaker threatens to alter Lake Erie ... forever.

**KARPINSKI:** Ohio can seize a leadership position in the rapidly growing, multi-billion-dollar U.S. offshore wind industry for the benefit of all

Ohioans. Lake Erie is an ideal location with ample available interconnect capacity, abundant winds and proximity to sources of large demand for electricity. The project has been thoroughly reviewed under the strictest of environmental regulations by 14 state and federal agencies.

*How would Icebreaker affect the bird and bat populations?*

**LIPAJ:** Icebreaker Windpower Inc. has been allowed to bypass crucial environmental studies, making this question difficult to answer. It's critical that these studies be completed, so that we fully understand the long-term impacts on the millions of birds that migrate across Lake Erie, as well as the walleye and perch populations that are finally thriving again.

**KARPINSKI:** Countless hours, resources and expense have been devoted to studying and addressing wildlife concerns. Federal agencies have said Icebreaker poses "limited

direct risk" to migratory birds and bats and is unlikely to adversely affect any threatened or endangered species. Every year, cats result in more than 10,000 times the number of bird mortalities than wind turbines do and office buildings 2,560 times more. Even so, we are committed to implementing best practices to further minimize risks. The project is supported by many environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, Ohio Environmental Council, Green Energy Ohio, Environmental Defense Fund and others.

*What are the positives/negatives of wind turbines on Lake Erie?*

**LIPAJ:** The greatest walleye fishery in the world may be altered forever. The millions of birds that migrate across Lake Erie, including the bald eagles that nest along its shores, will be put at risk. And once covered with the thousands of wind turbines that the developer plans to build by 2030, Lake Erie will lose much of its appeal to the millions of tourists that it draws each year, putting 124,000 existing jobs and current annual spending of \$14 billion for our regional economy at risk.

**KARPINSKI:** This is a unique opportunity to bring new energy and new jobs to Northeast Ohio. The project will create more than 500 jobs and generate \$253 million in economic impact. It will expand Ohio's

manufacturing sector. These benefits can be achieved without harming this great Ohio resource that we all treasure. Polling has shown that two-thirds of Ohioans are in favor of this project.

*What's the next step?*

**LIPAJ:** For more information and to learn how you can join our cause, please visit [lakeeriefoundation.org/issues/wind-turbines/](http://lakeeriefoundation.org/issues/wind-turbines/)

**KARPINSKI:** Continue the planning and commercial activities that are required to achieve construction of the project in the next few years. There has, unfortunately, been some misinformation spread about the project. We invite people to learn more about the project and get the facts here: [leedco.org/index.php/resources](http://leedco.org/index.php/resources).

## IS BUFFALO NEXT?

A California company has plans to build 50 offshore turbines near Buffalo but is waiting for the results of a feasibility study. Meanwhile, Ontario has passed a moratorium on turbines in Lake Erie, and a bill was introduced recently in the New York Senate to do the same.