

Wind project meeting draws a large crowd to Avon gym

By [Bob Mercer](#) on Aug 24, 2016 at 10:14 p.m.



AVON – People packed the bleachers shoulder to shoulder on one side of the school gym and filled dozens of folding chairs for a meeting Wednesday night about a project that would put up to 100 wind turbines north of town.

The South Dakota Public Utilities Commission organized the gathering in this Bon Homme County community as part of deciding whether to award a state permit to the project known as Prevailing Winds.

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“We’re glad to be here,” Chris Nelson, the commission’s chairman, told the crowd.

Some 300 people filled one side of the gym's bleachers six rows deep and many stood or sat in folding chairs at the ends.

"Importantly," Nelson said in his opening remarks, "no decisions are being made tonight or in the near future."

He said the purpose was to explain the project and receive public comments. People who wanted to speak were allowed up to 10 minutes. The deadline to file for party status, which allows a person to present witnesses and evidence and to ask questions during the commission's permit hearing, is Aug. 29 at 5 p.m. CT.

Ronnie Hornstra of Avon, president of Prevailing Winds, said the community is sitting on "a very abundant" natural resource.

"The greatest thing about wind is it consumes almost nothing," he said.

One speaker said the project would generate enough power to supply 10 rural electric cooperatives the size of Bon Homme Yankton electrical association. Ed Van Gerpen of Avon was the first opponent to speak.

The former state legislator described the situation as "David and Goliath." He wore his Avon Pirates red cap to show school pride.

"Not to be the wind capital of South Dakota," he said. He warned, "As more wind power comes on line, the additional costs will be passed on to the consumers."

Frank Kloucek of Scotland, another former legislator, told the crowd that he gave "my strong support" for the project and asked the PUC to approve the permit.

They were among the first dozen of the people who had raised their hands to speak. A court reporter took people's statements for the commission. Erik Johnson, who farms south of Avon, said he's an investor in the project. He acknowledged that perhaps the investors haven't done well enough in explaining it.