

## Public interest meets innovation

A range of large-scale permitting projects—logging operations, industrial agriculture, traditional power plants—regularly place demands on roads and local resources. Now a growing interest in alternative energy sources presents a fresh challenge to local officials. Field says the companies

building wind farms in Dodge County work all over the United States on similar projects. He was not surprised to learn that every county they go to manages the permitting/damage assessment process differently. The companies encouraged Dodge County's effort to take a uniform approach.

Finally, Field notes that while the county supports such innova-

tive projects that represent a new approach to producing energy and protecting the environment, he says their commitment to protecting the public interest comes first. Establishing an effective working relationship between local officials and the decision makers on large-load projects was an important step in doing so. ■



Wind farm tower construction.

## Dodge County's step-by-step approach on large permitting projects

### 1 – Schedule early planning session

All groups with a stake in the outcome of the second wind farm project and the pipeline project assembled for early planning sessions. Before the trucks started to roll, Field and Bernhard called a meeting of individuals representing the general contractor, the utility coordinator, a trucking coordinator, the Wisconsin Department of Transportation and law enforcement officials. Together, they reviewed all aspects of the project and came up with strategies for minimizing disruptions and damage, and keeping things on schedule.

### 2 – Identify local concerns

Dodge County officials outlined their own issues of concern at the meeting, like public safety and establishing the condition of roads before, during and after the project. They explored a workable approach to damage assessments, restoration and cost recovery, and reviewed liability coverage limits and certificates of insurance requirements. The county also distributed its policies covering construction access and utility accommodation.

### 3 – Establish single point of contact

Insisting the general contractor name a key contact person was the change with the biggest positive impact on the process. Field says that having a single point of contact authorized to manage routes, update schedules and make damage assessments improved communication on the project tenfold. If there were problems, Bernhard knew whom to call to get action.

### 4 – Designate all staging areas and routes

Representatives on both sides surveyed project needs to designate best transportation routes and staging areas. For example, they reviewed how the contractor planned to prepare the route for huge cranes to cross county or town roads between tower sites. Bernhard says this involved putting down steel plates, a layer of stones and then wooden beams to carry the load and protect the roadbed. The county made a videotape record of the routes to log pre-existing conditions before the project commenced. They inspected every route with the project contact to identify hazards,

obstacles or other concerns, and determined who was responsible for addressing each one.

### 5 – Issue permits for all access points

Part of simplifying the process, the county worked with the project contact to identify permanent and temporary driveway entrances, and issued permits in compliance with access policy.

### 6 – Issue blanket permit for oversized and overweight loads

Aware of the permitting demands of a project that needs to move hundreds of large loads over many months, the county arranged to issue a blanket oversized and overweight permit to the general contractor and trucking firms. They billed the project monthly for related costs, including inspections, traffic sign removal and replacement, intersection modifications, right-of-way restoration and pavement repairs. They required the project managers to keep a daily log of the oversized/overweight loads, recording the route, the date and time, and the hauler.

### 7 – Conduct daily inspections

Bernhard, or someone he designated, inspected all routes used for the project every day to assess any new damage and determine responsibility. Gathering this information in a timely manner meant less confusion later over who pays for damages.

### 8 – Inspect all routes after project completion

The county's orderly approach to managing large-scale projects was in place by completion of the first wind farm. Bernhard retraced the construction truck routes to record the post-project condition of pavements, shoulders, ditches and access points. He used a previously shot video log for comparison. The process worked. Field says the contractor met with the county to review findings from this final inspection and paid off minor damages right away. Where it appeared stress from the loads and the volume of truck traffic shortened the expected life cycle of a pavement, the county developed a formula for compensation to offset future costs of resurfacing and billed the contractor.

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#### Contact

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#### Resources

<http://www.dot.wisconsin.gov/business/carriers/osow-permits.htm>

Link to facts and figures on Wisconsin permitting guidelines.