

Lowell Wind Project

GMP acquires easements on 1,662 acres

by Chris Braithwaite

EDEN — Facing a deadline that could have halted work on its Lowell Mountain wind project on January 1, Green Mountain Power (GMP) says it has acquired two wildlife “fragmentation-connectivity” easements that total 1,662 acres.

In a letter to the Public Service Board, GMP attorney Benjamin Marks said negotiations that began last winter were completed on December 6. He urged the board to approve the easements “as soon as possible after the two week comment period expires, in order to avoid the need to cease construction on December 31....”

The easements were part of a “memorandum of understanding” negotiated with the Agency of Natural Resources (ANR) which led the agency to support GMP’s application for a certificate of public good.

They became controversial last spring when the Public Service Board (PSB) issued that certificate, but said GMP must have the easements in place before construction could begin.

GMP appealed that condition, and won a delay until December 31. Construction on the project began in September.

All parties to the PSB hearing process, including the project’s opponents, have two weeks

to comment on the easements. In urging the PSB to approve them swiftly, Mr. Marks wrote that “cessation of on-going construction activities on this project would cause significant cost and delays, as the project now employs many subcontractors and nearly 200 individuals working on the project.”

The negotiations involved two substantial landowners in Eden, south of the wind project. According to a property transfer tax return at the Eden Town Clerk’s office, Green Mountain Power bought one of the parcels outright.

It paid Boomhour Brook Forest Ltd. of Glasgow, Scotland, \$1,065,000 for 728 acres of timberland.

GMP gave the development rights to that property to the Vermont Land Trust. Then it turned the property over to the second landowner, Eden’s Echo Forest Management Company, in return for the development rights to Echo Forest’s parcel of roughly 959 acres. Those development rights also went to the Vermont Land Trust.

“We are very pleased to present these easements to the Board as compliance filing,” Mr. Marks wrote to the PSB. “They provide ANR and the State of Vermont with a unique connectivity easement and provide 1,662 additional acres of mitigation for the Kingdom project.”

The easement granted by Eden’s Echo Forest Management permits the owner to conduct maple sugaring operations anywhere on the property.

The owner, identified in the documents as Errol Tabacco, also reserved the right to maintain a small family cemetery on the property, to use it for noncommercial, nonmotorized recreation, and to maintain two existing camps.