

Texas poised to double wind energy output



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PECOS COUNTY -- Wind storms in West Texas sent tumbleweed speeding down the street. But it's the steady gusts that blow through Pecos County daily that are powering the future.

"We were approached and I was open to change and interested," said rancher Bill Fort.

Fort is among the Texans leasing some of their land to wind farm companies. His family has been ranching in this region since the 1880s.

"When our ancestors came out here they put up windmills using gin poles and horse teams. And wind was all they had to pump water. I thought it was kind of logical really," he said.

Giant wind turbines now dot the horizon in a region known for oil and gas. In Pecos County alone, there are six massive wind farms. The wind industry set a record last year with a capacity of more than 60,000 megawatts of power. Texas is by far the top producer.

The big challenge: getting all the wind energy produced out here in far West Texas to the big cities that need the power. So the state is laying thousands of miles of transmission lines to get the job done.

Construction is supposed to be completed by the end of the year.

It can't happen soon enough for Doug May. May's the economic development director for Pecos County.

The \$6.8 billion the state is spending on new transmission lines will double the capacity to deliver wind power to Texas cities.

"Dallas, Houston, Austin, San Antonio, all the other metropolitan areas," May said.

That growth also allows rural towns in West Texas to escape the boom and bust cycle of oil and gas. Wind farms have their own struggle. They need support from Congress to renew tax credits and that support, even in Texas, can blow with the wind.

"I'll tell you what if we can help you understand it ya'll come out here to west Texas and will give you a tour and we'll show you what we're doing," Fort said.

While many in Pecos County stake their futures on wind energy, some are looking ahead to another resource that's plentiful in West Texas.

"As that technology gets better, I think we'll see a big mix of solar and wind," May said.

Texas, an oil and gas state, is also transforming itself into a renewable energy powerhouse.

Video at: <http://www.kvue.com/news/Wind-farms-in-Texas-191499131.html>