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Wind farm to service 10,000 households

GE's 15th project is expected to provide power to Big Island homes by March

By B.J. Reyes

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Fourteen wind turbines being built in South Point on the Big Island are expected to start providing power for as many as 10,000 households starting in 2007, officials announced yesterday.

"That's a shocking statistic in my mind -- it covers so many people with so few machines," said Tony Pace, chief executive officer of Apollo Power Corp., the Foster City, Calif.-based parent company of the new wind farm's owner and operator, Tawhiri Power LLC.

Known as the Pakini Nui Wind Project, the 21-megawatt wind farm is scheduled to go online in March with the power being sold to the Big Island's Hawaii Electric Light Co.

Financial details of the project were unavailable. Pace said he considered that information "proprietary" and declined to disclose such information. Construction began last month, after all permitting, environmental and archaeological requirements were met, Pace said.

The 1.5-megawatt turbines are being built by energy giant General Electric Co., which also is providing the financing for the venture.

Andy Katell, senior vice president of GE Energy Financial Services, said 5,000 of the same turbines are already in use worldwide.

"These are turbines that have a very good track record of performance globally," he said.

Katell also noted that the South Point location has "some of the best wind conditions that GE has ever seen in the whole world."

Pakini Nui is GE's first wind farm investment in Hawaii and 15th worldwide.

Warren Bollmeier, president of the Hawaii Renewable Energy Alliance, lawmakers and Lt. Gov. James "Duke" Aiona joined the energy company executives at a state Capitol news conference announcing the venture.

They praised the companies for helping Hawaii meet its goals of having at least 20 percent of the state's energy come from renewable sources -- such as wind, wave and solar power -- by 2020.

"Today in Hawaii we have the greatest opportunity to help our people to see that, first of all, our security is dependent on good, renewable, indigenous energy," said Senate Energy Chairman J. Kalani English (D, East Maui-Lanai-Molokai). "We also have to understand that as we move ahead, our people have to change our consumption patterns.

"All of that together will help us."

Bollmeier said Pakini Nui will essentially replace the nearby 9.3-megawatt Kamaoa Wind Farm, which began operations in 1987 and had 37 Mitsubishi turbines on 100 acres of land.

Pakini Nui is expected to increase the Big Island's 300 megawatts of generating capacity by an estimated 7 percent, adding increased system reliability and reserves, GE said.

The wind turbines would augment a 10.5-megawatt wind farm near Upolu Point at the northern tip of the island. All 16 of Hawi Renewable Development's Vestas turbines have been in operation since mid-May.

Elsewhere, Maui's first wind farm, the 30-megawatt Kaheawa facility, began fully operating this summer using 20 of GE's wind turbines. Shell Oil Co. also recently announced its plans for a \$200 million farm on a remote corner of Ulupalakua Ranch. The project would produce an additional 40 megawatts, or enough power for 15,000 homes.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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