

Does Dostis believe his opponents are giving his perspective a fair shake? He pauses, slowing for the first time his remarkably steady clip of articulate and impassioned answers. "No," he begins, "because I believe as we are building this project, that we are setting the bar so high for wind development in this state. We have spent millions of dollars in preparation for getting that site ready. We have gone well above and beyond every single area for building any kind of development in this state, but in particular wind."

"If you look at what we're doing just in terms of mitigation," he continues, "keep in mind we are impacting about 175 acres of land, right; there's some sensitive bear habitat in there, there's some wetlands in there, there's a concern that by building this on the ridgeline, we're fragmenting the forest, so animals won't have a natural corridor to get through. So what we are doing in mitigating this, so far to date, over 1,000 acres of land will be set aside in conservation on the property that's owned by the primary owner of the land . . . most of that land conserved in perpetuity, so he's basically giving up the right to that land in perpetuity. We are going to be required to purchase easements on other land to allow for connectivity of wildlife; there is going to be thousands of acres for that. So we're looking at over 2,000 acres of land that will be conserved in perpetuity to address the impacts that 174 acres will have."

Jeff Nelson, an environmental consultant whose firm, Vanasse Hangen Brustlin, does work for GMP, agreed that the company is maintaining a very high standard for protection of water quality and other natural resources. "This project is going to be the most monitored construction project in the state of Vermont in 25 years," he said. "We began a year ago monitoring water in all of the streams that run off the site; we took dry and wet samples. We are doing benchmark monitoring for all of the streams on the ridge, and will continue doing so for two years following. This is above and beyond anything that has ever been done before. We all recognize that it is a challenging environment to build a project [in], and that's why the project has been designed the way it

has." When asked if he were following a set of best practices, he said, yes, that they were following the guidelines established by ANR.

In a similar vein, he made reference to a high level of diligence by ANR in carrying out its mission. "ANR are there to protect the environment," he said, "and they are doing it very well. They are looking at the impacts that this project is having on bear feeding grounds, they are looking at the impacts it is having on wetlands, they are looking at what impacts it may have on storm water, and they are making damn sure that we are minimizing or eliminating those impacts, and, where we can, we are mitigating it. If you look at the amount of mitigating we are being required to do, it is extremely, extremely significant and far greater than any other wind development so far has been required to do. So the good news is they are doing their job really well, and in the end we're going to have a project that is going to benefit our customers, benefit Vermonters and benefit the wildlife of the state."

When I asked Wright what he experienced when he viewed the existing wind turbines on Sheffield Mountain, he responded with little enthusiasm: "It's a failure of humanity. It's a human failure to keep building and taking apart the landscape that created us. It's madness, it defiles us as a species. The hubris of humans will be our downfall. . . . I'd like my two granddaughters to have an intact, healthy landscape on which to live."

At the highest level of Vermont government, a different perspective reigns. Governor Peter Shumlin, who ran on a platform of renewable-energy development and, in particular, wind, said of the Lowell Mountain wind project, "I think it's great. I think they [the turbines] are beautiful." He also emphasized the trade-off question, saying that ridgeline development was far preferable to getting power from Vermont Yankee.

Meanwhile, the Lowell Mountain project is awaiting a final go-ahead. Greenwood, of the VNRC, who filed comments that present perhaps the final roadblock, said that all parties are waiting on the response from ANR, as the future of the project hangs in the balance.



Robert Dostis, spokesperson for Green Mountain Power, argues that wind power is a good step forward toward reducing our carbon emissions. Photo by Ken Russell.

Electrical Power Plays of the 1930s and a 'Miracle'

by Ricka McNaughton

I'll bet it was just the other day that you sat down with a friend over coffee and bantered in a cheerful but bitingly insightful manner about electrical transmission and distribution infrastructures, utility-rate filings, long-term kilowatt-hour deals, and the possible subtexts of bids by Canadian power companies wishing, of late, to gobble up Vermont utility companies. No? Maybe as an average, on-the-grid consumer seeking some kind of digestible perspective, you might turn away from all that for a moment.

Consider instead that, in the 1920s and '30s in Vermont, some citizens had simpler wants. Mainly, they just wanted electricity to get here. This is demonstrated in a set of recollections by an original Washington Electric Co-op (WEC) member.

Writing in a diary in 1939, and then commenting on those writings anonymously in a 1964 WEC annual report, he or she recorded the struggles of local citizens to bring the first electrical power to certain towns surrounding Montpelier. Among other things, there are teasingly brief accounts of dimly lit

back-room dialogues, utility company strong-arming and the flush of good feeling that comes from ultimate triumph over the powers of darkness.

Perhaps there are people around today who know or can guess the writer's identity, or quite likely, are familiar with the names the writer does mention. It's fair to wonder about issues of substantiation when coming upon an unsigned document. WEC, when asked about the text below, explained that the accounts of events are indeed supported by other documents held in the organization's archives.

The account shifts back and forth between the present of 1964 and the past of 1939 or so. You are never quite sure about time contexts, and there are some confusing missing bits, but there is more than enough to get the drift of things. Here's the excerpt for you to ponder, with a few bracketed clarifications:

One July day Harmon Kelly [E. Harmon Kelly, first president of WEC] called on Lorie and Elizabeth Tarshis to suggest their writing to Washington to ask about rural electricity. Raymond Ebbett and Lyle Young met with them. They decided to try to form an REA [Rural Electrification

Administration] Co-op. Meetings followed in people's living rooms.

On July 14th [no year given] the first public meeting, conducted by Harmon Kelly, was held in the Grange Hall, Maple Corner. It had been hard to get people to come. Meetings had been held before about getting Green Mountain Power and had always ended in disappointment. As Mr. Kelly talked, people became optimistic and began to suggest sources of water power. We even considered the radical idea of a diesel engine. Several strangers sat listening in the dark shadows at the back of the lamp lit hall. One made a long rambling speech against socialistic schemes ending: "And you'll have to admit I told you."

We found out who our visitors were when they went to the owners of the best farms and promised them Green Mountain Power within three weeks if they would "give up this nonsense." Harmon Kelly was told to give it up or lose his job. Neither bribes nor threats worked. On July 29th [1939] the REA Co-op was formed with Harmon Kelly, Lyle Young, and Elizabeth Kent Tarshis as incorporators.

[Here the writer is reminiscing in 1964:] My diary for October 7th 1939 reads: "Autumn color splendid. Electricity booming. Stakes set to mark where poles will be." On October 12th, the first pole was set on the McKnight farm in East Montpelier. I remember it, well braced, standing black against a cold sky with bright leaves whirling in the wind and a man from Washington saying: "You folks don't know what you've started. I wouldn't be surprised if you had a thousand members some day." The first hundred looked at each other in disbelief. No one imagined there would be more than three thousand in 1964.

On a May night in 1940, for the first time since the power was turned on, I drove along the County Road. In houses, dark last year or with lamps dimly burning, every window was a blaze of light. There was music everywhere—cows listening to records, housewives to radios. I stopped, found one friend happily running a new vacuum cleaner over an already immaculate rug. I hurried on to my own dark house and turned on every one of our new 100 watt bulbs. The miracle had come.

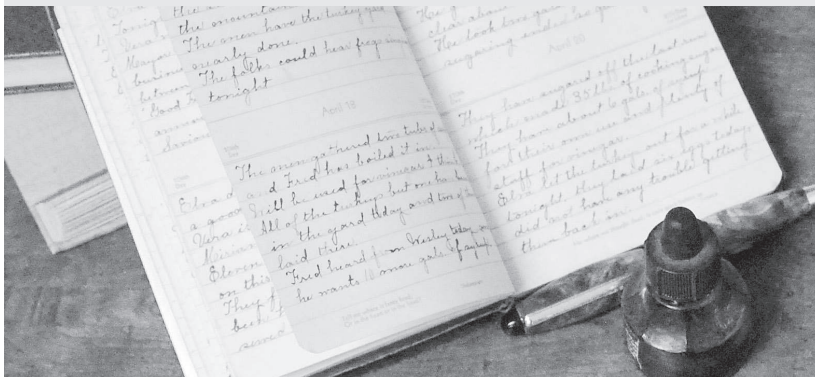


Photo by Ricka McNaughton