Clemson's $98 million wind project advances



COURTESY OF CLEMSON UNIVERSITY

This is a conceptual design of the Clemson University Restoration Institute wind energy research campus on the former Navy base in North Charleston.

BY CARLOS GALARZA
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CLEMSON — Clemson University's ambitious plans to house the world's largest wind turbine drive train testing facility in North Charleston is already benefiting the Upstate.

Fluor Corp.'s Greenville operation is designing the $98 million wind research campus for the Clemson University Restoration Institute.

Although the wind farm will be 242 miles away at the former Navy base in North Charleston, its economic impact could be felt in the Upstate and throughout all South Carolina.

Clemson University spokesman Peter Hull said the project has the potential to be a statewide industry with the kind of economic impact BMW has had on the Upstate.

"BMW reaches from the Upstate to Charleston," Hull said. "There's no reason why the wind industry can't go from Charleston to Greenville."

Hull said the Restoration Institute is trying to do with wind what the Clemson University International Center for Automotive Research (CU-ICAR) has done in the Upstate to attract automotive business clusters.

"We're building an ICAR model here," Hull said.

The Clemson University Restoration Institute received a $45 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy. That grant has been matched with $53 million in combined private-public funds to go toward building and operating a large-scale wind turbine

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drive train testing facility.

Angie Leidinger, executive director of Governmental Affairs at Clemson University, said the $45 million grant is the largest received by Clemson University and the second largest ever in the state.

In convincing the South Carolina Budget and Control Board to accept the grant, despite Gov. Sanford's concerns that the project relies too heavily on public funding and not enough on private investment, Leidinger said the project is a "significant step in South Carolina's opportunity to build a wind energy cluster."

According to Leidinger, three major companies — General Electric, Seamans and Lordex — have expressed interest in using the facility. The three companies together have 60 percent of the U.S. market in wind turbines.

Hull said the facility would be open to all manufacturers that want to contract with the Restoration Institute to test their wind turbines.

He said the machines could weigh between 200 and 500 tons. In other words, the world's largest wind turbine testing facility must be big enough to house the equivalent of about 45 to 100 elephants.

"We're talking about 300 tons for a 15 megawatt turbine," Hull said. "That gives you the scope of what we're putting in the building.

"We'll test (turbines) until they snap," Hull added. "We'll tell (manufacturers) where it broke, why it broke and when it broke."

Site work on the project turbine on track for 2012

site is expected to get underway sometime in the next three months and should be completed by 2012.

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