

Wind turbines set out to conquer Sweden's great north

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The secret? The giant Markbygden wind farm -- covering more than 500 square kilometres, or the equivalent of five times the size of Paris -- is being built in a virtually uninhabited, desolate stretch of Sweden's great north.

"If I were to try the same thing in Germany, it would take me 20 years to

get everyone's agreement," Wolfgang Kropp, the German head of the project, told AFP.

Standing on the shores of the Baltic Sea at the Piteaa harbour near the wind park site, he added: "For the same area, you would have 10,000 land owners. Here there are three.

"That's why we came here to Sweden in search of a good location," he said.

"In the south of the country, it is very difficult. There are farms, and vacation homes. Here in the north, there is no one," he said.

Kropp's company Svevind, a client of German wind power giant Enercon, is leading the construction of the park, with 1,101 [wind turbines](#) scheduled to be built by 2022.

They should then produce energy equivalent to the production of two nuclear reactors.

The site stretches across a vast area covered with dense pine forests interspersed with scattered villages of just a handful of brightly painted wooden houses.

They are surrounded by silence broken only by the occasional car or a fighter jet from a neighbouring base screaming past on a training mission.

The giant wind park is widely popular here.

The main forestry, paper and metals industries in the region are facing new environmental and climate regulations requiring them to significantly shrink their carbon footprints by 2020.

That is something a change in energy dependence should help with.

"We want to turn this region into a new centre of [green energy](#) production," said Robert Bergman of Solander Science Park, a scientific laboratory in Piteaa studying among other things the potential of wood and paper-based fuels.

The wind park project "is an obvious asset," he added.

It is also viewed by many as a new source of income and an incentive for people to stay on in the surrounding, increasingly deserted villages.

Despite the sparse population around the park site, there are nevertheless some dissenting voices.

Most opposition comes from the indigenous Samis, who fear the towering turbines will heavily encroach on their reindeer grazing areas, already significantly hit by forestry and tourism in the area.

In late April, the local Sami council refused a compensation package of 5,000 kronor (520 euros, 630 dollars) per turbine and per year, or a total of more than five million kronor each year after the entire park has been built.

"We say no. The amount does not correspond to the problems that this will cause and the threat it poses to our herds," Anders Ruth, who heads up the local council in Oestra Kikkejaure, said.

"The same number of reindeer will have to be fed in a much smaller area that will be much more developed," she added.

"This will not work and it is not possible to find other grazing grounds." About a quarter of the local Sami grazing areas would be affected by the

park, Ruth said.

In an attempt to appease the criticism, the project developers have stressed they will not fence in the area, but some 600 kilometres of new roads through the dense forests will in any case dramatically shrink the area where the reindeer are free to roam.

Svevind says it understands the reindeer owners concerns, but that there is no better alternative location for the park.

"It's true, the paper industry has already taken their forests, the dams have already taken their rivers, the mines have taken what's underground. And now it's the wind turbine," said Mikael Kyrk, a Swedish Svevind executive.

"But at the same time, that's the way development works."

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