

Amazon plans wind farm to power its datacenters

January 21 2015, by Jay Greene, The Seattle Times

Long criticized by some environmentalists for indifference to clean energy, Amazon.com took a big step toward using renewable energy Tuesday, announcing plans to support the construction and operation of a wind farm in western Indiana.

Amazon will work with Pattern Energy Group to build the Amazon Web Services Wind Farm for an undisclosed cost. The facility, which may come online as soon as early 2016, should generate about 500,000 megawatt hours of [power](#) annually. That's roughly enough to power 46,000 American homes a year.

Amazon will be using the [energy](#) to power the massive [datacenters](#) of Amazon Web Services, the division that rents data storage and computer-server time to corporations and agencies to run core business processes. Those datacenters, known as "regions" in company parlance, are huge energy hogs, sucking up power for computer servers used to run its website and Internet operations at other companies, including Netflix, Pinterest, and the Central Intelligence Agency.

The wind farm will provide energy for the PJM Interconnection grid, which provides power for parts of the Midwest and East Coast. The AWS regions that on are the PJM grid can then use the equivalent amount of power the wind farm provides to the grid. Currently, AWS has two regions in Virginia served by PJM. It's also working with government authorities to build a new region in Ohio that would also be on the PJM grid.

The new wind farm "will bring a new source of [clean energy](#) to the electric grid where we currently operate a large number of datacenters and have ongoing expansion plans to support our growing customer base," Jerry Hunter, an AWS vice president, said in a statement.

Amazon signed a 13-year power purchase agreement that locks in prices. While wind power is more expensive than coal power, the long-term deal gives Amazon more predictable pricing in what often is a volatile market.

For years, Greenpeace has criticized Amazon's energy policies, citing the company's dependence on coal power to run its datacenters. That started to change when the company announced plans in November to achieve 100 percent renewable energy usage for those datacenters.

The environmental group and the company have communicated in recent months, and Greenpeace Senior Climate and Energy Campaigner David Pomerantz believes that Amazon is "moving in the right direction."

"Today was the first sign that the (November) commitment is more than words on the page," Pomerantz said.

Increasingly, green energy is a competitive necessity for companies offering so-called cloud-computing services to corporate customers, who often have their own clean energy goals. That's one reason why AWS rivals such as Google and Microsoft also are shifting to clean energy for their datacenters.

Now Pomerantz would like to see Amazon be more transparent about the energy use of its datacenters, something its rivals have done to varying degree. It would go a long way toward allowing others to see how well Amazon measures up to its goal of using 100 percent renewable energy.

But transparency has rarely been an Amazon hallmark. The company has

never disclosed, for example, the number of Kindle electronic readers it has sold, or the number of Amazon Prime subscribers it has. Its argument always has been that the company doesn't want to give rivals competitive data.

"There was a feeling that that data was a secret sauce," Pomerantz said. "But that argument falls apart. All of Amazon's competitors do this."

Amazon declined to comment beyond its press release announcing the new wind farm.

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