

Georgia Power to buy wind energy

By **MARTIN RAND III**

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It's no secret that Public Service Commissioner Tim Echols is a huge advocate of using clean, renewable energy.

He added to his reputation when speaking to the Rotary Club of St. Simons Island Tuesday, announcing that the Public Service Commission had unanimously approved a new 20-year deal that will add 250-megawatts of Oklahoma wind energy to Georgia's electric grid.

Under the terms of the agreement, Georgia Power Co. will purchase the wind-generated electricity from Texas-based EDP Renewables North America. EDP will operate two wind farms in Oklahoma consisting of 122 wind turbines that will provide energy at a cost below what Georgia Power would pay for other methods of producing energy.

Echols praised the deal as a major step in advancing Georgia's energy diversity while keeping cost low to ratepayers.

"This is a great deal because Georgia will not have to construct 122 wind turbines on our own," he told about 70 people at the Sea Palms Conference Center, 515 Northwind Drive, St. Simons Island. "These are already built. This is renewable energy being brought in cheaper than our avoided cost on other forms of energy, and it's clean and green."

The cooperative deal goes into effect Jan. 1, 2016.

"We're very excited about this opportunity," Echols said.

Glynn County is diving deeper into renewable energy as well. The Glynn County Commission, the Glynn County Board of Education and the Brunswick and Glynn County Development Authority gave their approval of



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Public Service Commissioner Tim Echols speaks to The Rotary Club of St. Simons Island Tuesday at the Sea Palms Convention Center about what he says is Georgia's need for more renewable forms of energy.

Project Pine, a proposed solar panel farm that could come to Glynn County.

The farm, which would be built on 3,330 acres in southwest Glynn County, is one of four sites that could be selected for a solar panel farm should Georgia Power receive the bid for the project from Alabama-based Southern Power. It would mean approximately \$21 million in payments to Glynn County in lieu of taxes.

Echols says solar panels are popping up all over the state because the price of the equipment has dropped significantly.

"I think you're going to continue to see more and more solar projects," he said. "It definitely gives a hot area like (Glynn County)

some advantages during the peak afternoons during the summer."

Echols believes governments and businesses throughout the state are handling the increases in renewable energy usage the right way.

"What is right?" Echols asked before answering his own question. "It means not having a subsidy, not having any kind of renewable portfolio standard where a legislature or Washington (D.C.) is dictating that we have to do it. I like being able to do it if it makes sense, and it's starting to make more sense."

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