

Sarita wind farm gets \$114 million from government

By Fanny S. Chirinos
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Penascal Wind Farm, south of Sarita on U.S. Highway 77.
photo by George Gongora

Penascal Wind Farm south of Sarita, seen here in the first phase of construction, is now undergoing the second phase thanks to federal stimulus funds.
George Gongora photo



CORPUS CHRISTI — Developers of Peñascal Wind Farm in Sarita received \$114 million in stimulus funding intended to spur investments in clean energy and create jobs.

The U.S. Treasury Department and U.S. Energy Department announced the first round of awards from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act. The \$502 million fund creates additional up-front capital, enabling companies to create jobs and begin construction that may have been stalled until now.

Oregon-based Iberdrola Renewables started producing energy on the first phase of Peñascal in April, but construction on the second phase had stalled, said spokeswoman Jan Johnson.

"We likely would not be building out Peñascal II had it not been for this money," Johnson said. "This certainly is a big shot in the arm for renewable energy and South Texas in particular."

This second phase, similar to the first, will consist of 84 wind turbines capable of producing 202 megawatts of energy, enough to provide power to 70,000 homes and businesses. Energy production is expected to begin by the end of the year, Johnson said.

Almost 100 people began working at the wind farm after Iberdrola heard news of the funding, Johnson said. The number is expected to grow to about 215, she added.

The program, established under Section 1603 of the Recovery Act, is expected to provide more than \$3 billion in financial support for clean energy projects by providing direct payments in lieu of tax credits. Production tax credits, which were available for working wind farms until November 2008, became obsolete during the second half of that year, Johnson said.

"Credits were not being bought, so there was no money coming in like many of us expected there to be," she said. "We spent more than \$2 billion in 2008 in renewable technology. This stimulus funding helps us from going under."

As a result of this first round of funding, more than 2,000 Americans will have access to jobs in the renewable energy industry, both in construction and in manufacturing, according to the Energy Department.

