

ALTERNATIVE ENERGY

Biggest wind complex around gets to churning in West Texas

By John McFarland

ASSOCIATED PRESS

DALLAS — The world's largest wind farm officially got up and running Thursday, with all 627 towering wind turbines churning out electricity across 100,000 acres of West Texas farmland.

The Roscoe Wind Complex, which began construction in 2007 and sprawls across four counties near Roscoe, west of Abilene, is generating its full capacity of 781.5 megawatts, enough to power 230,000 homes, said Chicago-based E.ON Climate & Renewables North America Inc., a

subsidiary of German energy company E.ON AG.

"This is a truly significant milestone for us," said Patrick Woodson, the company's chief development officer. "In three years, to be able to take this project from cotton fields to the biggest wind farm in the world is something we're very proud of."

The complex is about 220 miles west of Dallas and 300 miles south of the land where billionaire oilman T. Boone Pickens had planned an even larger wind farm before he scrapped the idea in July.

Texas leads the nation in wind power produc-

tion, and the newest wind farm tops the capacity record of 735.5 megawatts set by another West Texas farm, southwest of Abilene.

Renewable energy makes up a small fraction of the electricity grid, but the wind and solar sectors were among the fastest growing in the U.S. before the recession. The growth of wind power in Texas has continued this year but at a slower rate than last year.

"We are expecting '09 to be a somewhat smaller year overall but still a fairly solid year," said Kathy Belyeu of the American Wind Energy

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Association.

At the Roscoe wind farm, the turbines range from about 350 to 415 feet tall and generally are spaced about 900 feet apart, Woodson said. The land is leased, mostly from cotton farmers who continue to work the fields around them, he said. Texas is the nation's leading producer of cotton, most of it from West Texas.

"It's a use that appears to be quite complimentary," Woodson said. "This whole community was extremely welcoming to us."

E.ON, which maintains a development office in Austin, has eight active wind facilities across the state, but it could be awhile before the company builds more huge wind farms in West Texas because of the glut of wind companies and lack of transmission lines, Woodson said. The state is planning more lines from West Texas to more heavily populated areas, but those won't be completed for at least two more years.

Pickens cited the transmission issue when he pulled the plug on his planned wind farm after investing \$2 billion in 687 turbines on the 200,000-acre project.