



Mark Udall, Senator from Colorado, tours the Siemens Test Wind Turbine at the National Wind Technology Center in Louisville in 2013.

CREDIT: FLICKR/ MARK UDALL

While the politics of fracking has taken hold of election-year energy discussions in Colorado, the wind power industry is quietly surging. On Friday Vesta Wind Systems announced it was hiring 800 new workers, part of plans to fill 1,500 jobs this year in Colorado, after receiving orders for 370 turbines over the last few weeks. The jobs will be full-time, high-skilled jobs primarily in the manufacturing of blades and towers.

"We have received U.S. orders of 740 MW in the last month alone, so our North American factories are very busy, as are factories overseas," Vestas spokesman Adam Serchuk told ThinkProgress. "As far as I can see this will be the case at least through the end of 2015."

At the end of June, Vestas, the world's biggest wind turbine manufacturer with its U.S. headquarters in Portland, Oregon, announced orders for 450 megawatts worth of wind turbines for two U.S. wind farms. Totalling 225 machines, the farms will be in New Mexico and Kansas and scheduled for completion by the end of 2015. In early July the

company received another order for 166 megawatts of wind turbines for a Minnesota wind farm. There was also one more order for 124 megawatts for a wind farm in North Dakota.

Xcel Energy, Colorado's largest electricity supplier, was deemed the nation's top utility for wind-based power generation last year by the American Wind Energy Association. Forty-three percent of Xcel's 5,000-plus megawatts of wind power is based in Colorado.

There are other benefits than jobs to continued development of wind power in Colorado and across the country.

"By hosting turbines on their land, Colorado farmers, ranchers and other landowners receive upwards of \$7.5 million a year in land lease payments from wind projects," wrote Sarah Cottrell Propst, executive director of the Interwest Energy Alliance, a trade company representing the renewable energy industry, last week. "Communities gain from a broader tax base, and wind farms pay out millions a year, helping to pay for roads, schools, and other critical public projects."

According to Propst, wind power represents a capital investment of over \$4.3 billion to date in Colorado. She writes that for a brief time last year wind power accounted for over 60 percent of Xcel's Colorado output and that in the state, wind displaced nearly seven million tons of carbon dioxide emissions in 2013 — the equivalent of taking 1.1 million cars off the road.

Vestas has four factories in Colorado and will employ 2,800 people in the state by the end of the year. According to the Vestas website, as of earlier this month the total year-to-date announced order intake was 2,704 megawatts.

In 2013 wind power accounted for about 13.8 percent of Colorado's electricity supply. The state has 2,332 megawatts of installed wind energy, ranking it 10th in the country, across 28 projects. According to the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, when ranking the 50 states for their onshore wind potential, Colorado holds the nation's thirteenth best.

* Investment in domestic wind energy projects has suffered setbacks in the last couple years as Congress has failed to consistently renew the 2.3 cents per kilowatt-hour Production Tax Credit (PTC). In early 2013, Vestas was forced to lay off hundreds of workers in Colorado due to this inconsistency, and the company continues to monitor

developments closely as details for future incentives are being slowly hashed out. Serchuk said they are optimistic everything with the PTC will be sorted out.

"As every company must remain adaptable, we may adjust if the market environment significantly changes, but the recent number of large orders in the U.S. and elsewhere is a good indication that demand for our products is robust," he said.