

Windsor park turns brown plains green

Industrial hub a Colorado bright spot for clean energy, high-paying jobs

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Photo by Linda Mcconnell / Special To The Rocky

Blades for wind turbines sit outside the Vestas plant at the Great Western Industrial Park in Windsor. At 1,500 acres, the industrial park is the largest in northern Colorado and home to four manufacturing companies that are on track to create more than

1,000 high-paying jobs.

For most people, Windsor is just an exit off Interstate 25 they speed by on their way to Cheyenne - or that place in Weld County hit by a tornado last May.

But it also is home to the Great Western Industrial Park - a \$420 million economic development whirlwind of sorts - where companies are creating high-paying manufacturing jobs at a time when many other businesses are slimming down.

"It's definitely a bright spot for the Colorado economy that is helping to offset job reductions elsewhere," said Martin Shields, an economist at Colorado State University.

Great Western is the largest industrial park in northern Colorado.

With 1,500 acres, it approaches the size of the biggest business park in the Denver area, the Meridian International Business Park in Douglas County.

Great Western is half the size of the 3,000-acre Centerra in Larimer County, which is largely retail, office and residential, not a hub for manufacturing companies.

The Great Western Industrial Park is only 5 years old but already boasts four manufacturing companies that have staked out claims in the park or are on track to create more than 1,000 high-paying jobs and invest about \$420 million in plants, property and people.

Most recently, Connecticut-based Hexcel announced it will invest \$50 million and initially bring 100 people to the park to service the adjacent Vestas, the well-publicized wind turbine company.

Other deals could follow.

"We're very happy with the pipeline of companies that are showing an interest in the park," said Alex Yeros, managing director at Denver-based Broe Group, parent of the park, as well as the railroad line that serves it.

The Broe Group, headed by Denver industrialist Pat Broe, bought excess land from Eastman Kodak about three years ago to create the park. But the framework for it was already in place two years earlier when Broe and the state landed Owens-Illinois to build the first new U.S. bottling plant in more than two decades.

One thing that sets the park apart from competition is that Broe also owns the Great Western Rail of Colorado that runs through it. The railroad is owned by OmniTRAX, a Broe Group subsidiary. OmniTRAX is the largest privately held rail services company in North America. Many of the industrial users in the Windsor area, even those outside the park, use it.

The completed value of the park, which eventually will include almost 1,300 residential units, is estimated to be \$6 billion in today's dollars.

In addition to Owens-Illinois, Vestas and Hexcel, Front Range Energy is a major tenant with two operations at Great Western. Front Range produces more than 40 million gallons of ethanol annually at the park, including some of it from corn on the property that is leased to farmers. Immediately adjacent, another plant captures more than 300 tons of carbon dioxide emitted daily by the ethanol operation.

Being green is a focus

Three of the four companies - Vestas, Front Range Energy and Hexcel - are involved in clean energy enterprises.

But even Owens-Illinois is green, depending on your definition. It would love to increase the amount of recycled glass it uses to build more than 1 billion bottles a year, but has trouble getting its hands on the type of high-quality glass required, notes Jim Stoneburg, controller for Owens-Illinois.

"I think recycled glass accounts for 10 to 15 percent of our bottles," he said. "I think we could go over 50 percent, if we could find the glass we need."

Owens-Illinois has launched a massive effort to recycle every scrap of waste, and the plant has the latest in pollution scrubbers in its smokestack, as well as the most energy-efficient furnaces available, he said.

"We are riding the wave of green industries," said Rich Montgomery, vice president of Industrial Development for Broe.

"We're not really a green park, although I would say that is a focus," he added. "No. 1, what we want to do is get the best manufacturing companies we can, as is the case with

Owens-Illinois, as is the case of Vestas and the others. We want companies that are leaders in the field, are very clean and create jobs.

"A company that creates two jobs on a 50-acre site is not for us," Montgomery said. "And we want companies that will be here and growing over the next 20, 30, 40 or 50 years."

Green industry has grown organically in Windsor, "but now we're going to promote it," said Kelly Arnold, town manager.

Windsor, mostly a bedroom community, is one of the fastest-growing towns in Colorado. Its population in 2007 of 17,310 was 75 percent higher than the 9,896 people in 2000.

The town is in the early stages of discussing how to encourage green companies and dictate sustainable building practices under its economic development plan, he said.

Green growth is not just in Windsor, but is sweeping all of northern Colorado, Arnold and others pointed out.

While the Great Western Park is "huge" in its own right, it is but one player in the region, noted Larry Burkhardt, president and CEO of Upstate Colorado Economic Development.

"My take on it is that this area of the state is becoming known throughout the world as a leader in renewable energy," he said. "Notice I said *a* leader and not *the* leader."

Other clean-energy sector companies in northern Colorado, outside of Windsor, include AVA Solar, UQM Technologies and Spirae Inc.

"This is something that is going to continue throughout northern Colorado," he said. "It is far beyond Windsor."

And that's fine by Yeros, of the Broe Group.

For example, Denmark-based Vestas chose Brighton for its third phase instead of staying at the Great Western park. In a nutshell, Vestas needed primarily industrial land for its expansion and not the more valuable rail-served property at Great Western.

"I'm very happy for Brighton," Yeros said. "We like to look forward, not look backward. At a time when so many industries are facing major contractions, we feel fortunate to be developing a place that is creating jobs."

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