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Sweetwater Receives Growing Green Award

By sweetwater

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The City of Sweetwater has received the Growing Green Award from the Texas Engineering Extension Service (TEEX) and the U.S. Department of Commerce Economic Development Administration (EDA). Sweetwater received the award for growing its economy through renewable wind energy.

In 1999, a group from the American Electric Power (AEP) decided to build a renewable energy (wind) park called the Trent Mesa between Abilene and Sweetwater. This park would consist of 100 turbines that could produce 100 MW of output.

Sweetwater is the seat of Nolan County, which became the focal point for wind farm expansion in North America, creating jobs and bringing investments into the area. In 2008, at the height of the construction, more than 1,000 people were employed in the wind energy industry in Nolan County. The Nolan County Commissioners established a tax abatement policy that spurred construction, including new hotels and other service industries. Taxable evaluation in the county rose from \$500 million in 1999 to \$2.8 billion in early 2009.

Sweetwater's educational facilities have benefited from the expansion of the wind farms. There have been two new schools constructed and three have built needed additions. Schools have had funding to start new programs, such as an early college program. The wind industry has created local, well-paying jobs that will allow students to return and raise their children in rural Texas.

The award was presented on Nov. 15, during the Growing Green Statewide Conference in Austin. Receiving the award on behalf of the city of Sweetwater was Greg Wortham. The 2011 Growing Green Awards recognized 11 initiatives that have created economic value and opportunity through environmental stewardship, energy conservation and sustainable practices in Texas rural communities.

About the Texas Engineering Extension Service (TEEX)

TEEX, a member of the Texas A&M University System, offers hands-on, customized, first-responder training, homeland security exercises, technical assistance and technology transfer services impacting Texas and beyond. TEEX programs include fire services, homeland security, law enforcement, public works, safety and health, search and rescue and economic development.