The City of Lincoln prides itself on topping lists like the “Happiest Place to Live.” For all the wonderful things about Lincoln, its sources of energy are outdated. In fact, Lincoln’s utility Lincoln Electric System (LES) currently relies on burning coal for more than 80 percent of its energy, compared to the national average which is below 40 percent.

Built in 1958, Sheldon Station sits just south of Lincoln near the town of Hallam and it is one of several coal plants that LES buys power from. This plant is owned and operated by Nebraska Public Power District (NPPD) and it contributes to air and water quality issues for the surrounding community.

NPPD’s own long range plan reveals that the best path forward for its customers, including Lincoln, includes phasing out its Sheldon Station coal plant and increasing its reliance on wind energy. With great wind potential in the area and lots of local support for wind energy, it’s time for Southeast Nebraska to transition from coal to wind.

**IT’S TIME TO PHASE OUT THE SHELDON COAL PLANT**

According to the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency’s “Toxic Release Inventory,” Sheldon Station is the second largest source of toxic pollution in Lancaster County, and accounts for more than 1/3 of Lancaster County’s toxic pollution.

Sheldon emits hundreds of thousands of tons of pollution each year. In 2011, Sheldon emitted:

- 4,062 tons of Sulfur Dioxide
- 6,535 tons of Nitrogen Oxides;
- 53,000 pounds of Hydrochloric Acid
- 1,780,305 tons of Carbon Dioxide.¹

The Sheldon coal plant has the second highest NOx rate in the entire country, due largely to its age and lack of modern pollution controls. NOx is a harmful pollutant that contributes to the formation of soot and smog that then trigger respiratory ailments, heart attacks, and premature death.²

The Sheldon Station coal plant is also putting water quality at risk. The plant committed 147 Clean Water Act violations, the fourth highest number of violations of any power plant in the nation.³ Despite legal requirements to receive updated permits for air and water pollutants, NPPD’s air and water permits for Sheldon are expired.⁴

Continued operation of the Sheldon Station would lead to the continued export of Nebraska energy dollars to Wyoming and would require at least $49 to $213 million in retrofit costs to reduce pollution and comply with health and environmental standards, and that’s before the cost of carbon dioxide is factored in. **Customer-owners like us will foot that bill.** Nebraska already ranks fourth in the nation in coal imports per capita, spending $203 each year for every man, woman and child on imported coal.⁵

NPPD has identified the Sheldon Station coal plant as a candidate for retirement, and it is our job as a community to help build a responsible transition away from coal. A smart transition plan will identify ways to develop
Southeast Nebraska’s locally grown wind resources, and create opportunities for workers to move from the old energy economy into family-sustaining jobs in the new clean energy economy.

**WIND ENERGY IS READY TO TAKE COAL’S PLACE**

The phase out of Sheldon Station in addition to several proposed wind farms nearby presents a tremendous opportunity to complete a coal-to-clean energy transformation that will benefit the local economy and improve public health.

These wind projects would provide tremendous value to the local economy. A 2012 report titled “Securing Nebraska’s Energy and Economic Future” estimated that if Nebraska committed to producing half of its electricity from wind, it could add 14,000 jobs to the Nebraska economy and save customers $3.8 billion over twenty years on electric bills. Wind project owners also provide valuable benefits to local communities in property tax payments. A recent study titled “Impact of Wind Energy on Property Taxes in Nebraska” by Bluestem Energy Solutions and Baird Holm Law Offices outlines how each megawatt of wind development provides $6,000 in revenue to the county where it is constructed.

Communities like Hallam, Norris, Hickman, Wilber, Crete, and the Beatrice have an enormous opportunity to drive the conversation about coal-to-wind transition. Customer-owners must weigh in now with local public power representatives at Norris Public Power District, NPPD and LES to ask for a phase out plan for Sheldon that utilizes local wind energy to help move this next phase of energy development forward in Southeast Nebraska.

For more information about what you can do to help transform Southeast Nebraska’s energy landscape, contact Ken Winston (402-212-3737) or Johnathan Hladick (402.687.2103 x 1022) and go to PowerLincolnLocally.com.

**ENDNOTES**

1 2011 emissions as reported by NPPD to the Energy Information Administration.
2 See Clean Air Task Force, “Death and Disease from Power Plants” http://www.catf.us/hbos problems/power_plants/
3 Detail available here: http://projects.nytimes.com/toxic-waters/polluters/power-plants
5 Union of Concerned Scientists: Burning Coal Burning Cash.
6 A copy of the report can be found at powerlincolnlocally.com.
7 A copy of the report can be found at powerlincolnlocally.com.