

An Alternative Vision for the Calumet Region

Some local leaders have promoted tourism development to expand the economy in the Calumet Region and provide more jobs. I have worked in the tourism industry in California, Nevada, and Florida. For many reasons, I don't believe that vision is as practical as developing the Calumet Region as a center for alternative energy research and production.

The Calumet Region could become a center for Earth friendly energy production and research. About a century ago, steel mills were built on the south end of Lake Michigan so that coal could come here by rail and iron ore could come here by ship for steel production. Some of the land and buildings that were used to make steel could now be used for energy production and research. Technology has improved to allow coal generated electricity to be free of many pollutants. By using industrial property along Lake Michigan, research can be conducted here to learn how to use industrial waste, water, sunlight, and wind to generate electricity with little interference to residential properties.

The steel mills would gain a new source of revenue with energy production. China and India can not sell energy to the U.S. as they can sell steel to U.S. companies. So, this new source of revenue for the local steel mill companies would be more stable year round. The building of plants for energy production would provide good paying jobs right away for many masons, electricians, ironworkers, carpenters, laborers, and others.

Energy from the Calumet Region could be sold in Indiana, Illinois and southwest Michigan. Experiments in wave or current generated hydro power could be done. Solar energy panels could be researched, built, and tested. The breezes along Lake Michigan could be used for wind turbine research. That research could benefit every community along the shores of the Great Lakes in both the U.S. and Canada.

The prospect of research and development of the use of Earth friendly energy sources would attract scientific firms and employees to the Calumet Region. Purdue University engineering students could get internships and jobs at such firms. Students from other local colleges and technical schools would benefit, also.

The value of the industrial properties and the surrounding research properties would increase so that the property tax burden on homeowners, renters, and small businesses could be reduced. Relatively low cost energy would interest many businesses in locating branches here.

Transforming the Calumet Region into an energy production and research center would be easier than creating a vacation destination. I believe that the long-term financial benefits from becoming an energy production and research center far outweigh the purported benefits of becoming a tourist attraction.

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