



A film by  
**Laura Israel**

83 min, HD cam, color, English, USA, 2010



## **FIRST RUN FEATURES**

The Film Center Building, 630 Ninth Ave. #1213

New York, NY 10036

(212) 243-0600 Fax (212) 989-7649

Website: [www.firstrunfeatures.com](http://www.firstrunfeatures.com)

Email: [info@firstrunfeatures.com](mailto:info@firstrunfeatures.com)

[www.windfallthemovie.com](http://www.windfallthemovie.com)

## Praise for *Windfall*

“Could take the sails out of wind power!”  
– Anthony Kaufman, [Speakeasy, Wall Street Journal](#)

“Chilling!” – Stanley Fish, [New York Times](#)

“Never alarmist or patronizing...strung so tightly and effortlessly together that it’s hard to believe this is a first-time filmmaker at hand.”  
– Christopher Bell, [The Playlist, Indiewire](#)

“Beautifully produced, elegantly structured, edited authoritatively, with unforgettable characters.” – Patricia Aufderheide, [Center for Social Media](#)

“Provides a much-needed view of the growing backlash against the rapid expansion of the wind industry.” – Robert Bryce, [Energy Tribune](#)

“Fascinating, insightful, and fair...An intimate portrait of one New York community in heavy battle.” – Stewart Nusbaumer, [Huffington Post](#)

## Synopsis

Wind power... it’s sustainable ... it burns no fossil fuels...it produces no air pollution. What’s more, it cuts down dependency on foreign oil. That’s what the people of Meredith, in upstate New York first thought when a wind developer looked to supplement the rural farm town’s failing economy with a farm of their own -- that of 40 industrial wind turbines. *Windfall*, a beautifully photographed feature length film, documents how this proposal divides Meredith’s residents as they fight over the future of their community. Attracted at first to the financial incentives that would seemingly boost their dying economy, a group of townspeople grow increasingly alarmed as they discover the impacts that the 400-foot high windmills slated for Meredith could bring to their community as well as the potential for financial scams. With wind development in the United States growing annually at 39 percent, *Windfall* is an eye-opener that should be required viewing for anyone concerned about the environment and the future of renewable energy.

## **Director's Statement**

I have owned a small cabin on a dirt road in Meredith NY for over 20 years. I have to chop wood to stay warm, and there is no entertainment other than reading and looking at stars. It's beautiful. One day I noticed a small article in the local paper stating that birds would not be affected by the proposed wind turbine development in the area. No big announcement or headline, just a small mention. I thought, wow it would be great to have a turbine on my property, so I started to do some research. I was completely taken aback by some of the information I found.

The first proposal in Meredith called for forty 400-foot tall turbines, sited 1,000 feet from people's homes. These were not the friendly windmills I first pictured, nor would they be far off in the distance, like ones I've seen in the desert. Mountains would have to be clear-cut, and turbines embedded in tons of concrete to keep them standing. Roads would be widened to accommodate the huge blades, which can be up to 180 feet long. I found out about the potential for problems in homes close to turbines, such as low frequency sound and shadow flicker when the sun gets behind the moving blades. I started to question the scale of this type of development for the area, which is both rural and residential. I talked to others in the community, and found I was not alone in questioning the proposed development. In fact, many neighbors had gone through the same transition I had – initial excitement about helping to save the world quickly changing into concern for protecting the health and wellbeing of residents and the future of their community.

I started to tell my friends back in New York City what I had found out about potential negative aspects of industrial wind energy. I was shouted at, called a NIMBY (not in my backyard) and a whiner. I realized that if people won't even question the status quo when it comes to this issue, then it really requires further scrutiny and in fact would be a great reason to make a film.

When I set out to make *Windfall*, I thought it would be a half hour long. Then we started filming town meetings, talking to the residents and became fascinated by the dynamic of the people in the town. Wind developers had signed agreements with landowners, but

also made them sign confidentiality agreements, so the development was cloaked in secrecy. This created an air of paranoia and apprehension among residents. The long standing Meredith town supervisor, trying to save the local dairy industry with a boost from wind energy money, came under attack by residents who felt he had a conflict of interest because he had been approached to sign a wind contract. He starts the film being a well-liked guy with “an easy job” who finds himself the focus of a controversy spinning out of control.

The issue divides the community and people who had been friends for thirty, forty years stopped speaking to each other. Neighbors who once helped each other out or planned picnics and charity dinners now would not be seen in the same place. Some residents stopped attending church for fear of reprisal from others. I have heard of places where this split has divided families.

We eventually took our cameras to visit residents of the Tug Hill region of NY, who had recently accepted a wind facility of nearly 200 turbines. We also visited two other towns near Meredith in Delaware County which had the political and financial muscle to ban wind turbines altogether.

I began to realize that *Windfall* needed to be a feature length film in order to properly convey the complexities of the issue. The subject of wind energy ends up becoming a backdrop for revealing how a community can become extremely divided over an issue, struggle to work through it and negotiate to move forward together despite their differences.

## Windfall Main Characters, In Order of Introduction

### **Meredith NY**

**Frank Bachler** – Has been the reigning Meredith Town Supervisor since 1987. He starts out in the film as a well-liked public official seeking the financial benefits of wind energy to support the faltering farm economy in the town. As the film progresses, he finds himself the focus of a growing controversy he could not have imagined.

**Ken Jaffe, MD** – Doctor from Brooklyn NY, moved to Meredith to raise grass fed beef. Also has a degree in public health, and explains the sound issues and potential health concerns with wind turbines. Ken is Frank Bachler's closest neighbor, and is the first resident to find out about the proposal.

**John Hamilton** – A large land-owning dairy farmer in the town, he runs the Dairy Festival every year, and is also head of the volunteer Fire Department. He has signed a wind contract, and his son Roger Hamilton is on the Town Board. He is very outspoken about his dislike of the Meredith Alliance.

**Bob Rosen** – Instrumental in forming the Meredith Alliance, a non –profit advocacy group formed to educate residents about the issues surrounding industrial wind energy. Bob notices the wind energy company's test tower from his kitchen window, and begins his research.

**Rachel Polens** – Owns a framing shop on Main Street, and initially “wanted a couple of wind turbines”. She finishes building her “dream” house just as the wind issue erupts. She is direct neighbors with John Hamilton and is runs the initial informational meetings on wind energy that initiates contention.

**Ron and Sue Bailey** – Ron was an editor and writer for LIFE Magazine, but moved up to Meredith when the magazine folded. They have lived there for roughly 30 years, and are very involved in civic affairs. The Baileys initially signed a wind contract, but then hired a lawyer and were able to rescind the contract.

**Tara Collins** – a “newcomer” to Meredith, Tara and her husband are setting up a self-sustaining farm. Tara is instrumental in the organizing the Meredith Alliance, and writes a column in the local paper called the “Meredith News”.

**Keitha Capouya** – Meredith Planning Board chairperson for 5 years. Although this is a volunteer position, Keitha diligently takes on the task of critically researching the Meredith wind proposal for over a year in order to write a wind facilities zoning ordinance for the town. Keitha reveals that she has owned a publishing company with her husband and in fact, has written and edited encyclopedias.

**Marc Schneider**- an electrical engineer working for the local electrical cooperative in facilitating wind energy proposals. A proponent of local energy generation, Marc's

opinion is that wind energy is positive for the area. Marc is also willing to share critical information about wind energy specifics with the planning board, which is instrumental to their research.

**Steve McCarthy** – has worked for many years in the financial business, and retired to Meredith to run a small business. He plans to power his house with solar panels and a small wind turbine. Steve discusses the issues concerning the financial aspect of industrial wind energy development.

**Dan Birnbaum** – has been a lifelong environmentalist, and owns a bookstore at a local college campus. At first he didn't believe there could be anything wrong with wind energy, but Rachel invited him to an informational meeting. He discovers that the motivation driving wind energy is financial so then changes his opinion.

### **Tug Hill, Lowville, NY, Maple Ridge Wind Facility**

**Gordon Yancey** – can see 170 of the 195 turbines erected in the town from his front porch. Gordon is upset about the way the wind companies approached the town officials, and then finalized plans before townspeople had a chance to learn details about the scope of the industrial wind facility. His advice to other towns approached by wind companies is, "Ask questions. Do your homework."

**Eve Kelley** – became ill when the turbines started turning. Eve says she is often sick to her stomach and has problems with the sound. The nearest turbine is roughly 1,000 feet from her home, and Eve says at night the walls feel like they are vibrating from the noise.

**Rick Beyer** - does not have a wind contract, and feels he was misled by the wind companies about the amount of turbines that would be close to his home. The shadow flicker in his house is a problem for his son, who puts blankets over the drapes to block it out, but even this is not entirely successful.

## **Filmmaker Bios**

### **Laura Israel, Director/Producer**

*Windfall* director Laura Israel grew up in New Jersey and spent her teenage years wandering around downtown Manhattan taking photos. After earning a degree in film from NYU, she edited music videos for Lou Reed, Keith Richards, David Byrne, New Order, Patti Smith, Ziggy Marley, Sonic Youth and many others. Laura has worked as photographer/filmmaker Robert Frank's editor for nearly two decades; the films have screened all over the world and won many awards. She also edited Stephanie Black's feature documentary *Africa Unite, Life For a Child* directed by Academy Award nominated DP Ed Lachman and *Music of Regret* by photographer Laurie Simmons. Editing credits include advertising and television promo campaigns that have garnered AICP awards, International Film and TV awards, a GLAAD award, an Emmy award, and a Monitor award for editing.

### **Brian Jackson, Director of Photography**

Working as both a commercial director and a cinematographer for the past thirteen years, Brian has honed his filmmaking skills over a variety of projects. His work in the documentary realm is his true passion and has taken him to many parts of the world: from war-torn Africa to remote villages in Peru. Recently Brian completed work on the documentary *Windfall*, which explores the darker side of wind power as an alternate energy source in a rural upstate New York town. When he's not shooting he can be found rock climbing in Southern California or camping in the Mountains of upstate New York.

### **Autumn Tarleton, Producer**

Autumn Tarleton most recently produced the Isabella Rossellini-directed documentary *Animals Distract Me* that premiered at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival. The film, which is a fantastical take on a day in the life of Rossellini, will have its television premiere on Earth Day on Discovery's Planet Green channel. She also post-produced Isabella Rossellini's Webby-nominated *Green Porno* and *Seduce Me* series for the Sundance Channel. Last year Autumn spent a month producing a documentary called *In*

*the Hearts of Africa* in the Democratic Republic of Congo. The film focuses on children struggling to survive with juvenile diabetes in the city of Kinshasa. In 2008 she also post-produced *Life for a Child*, another documentary about children with diabetes set in Nepal. *Life for a Child* won best documentary short at the Cinequest Film Festival the following year.

### **Stacey Foster, Co-Producer**

Stacey Foster is a film/video editor based in NYC. Stacey edited the Isabella Rossellini-directed documentary *Animals Distract Me* that premiered at the 2011 Sundance Film Festival, as well as four series of short films with Isabella Rossellini for the Sundance Channel. The *Green Porno* series has played at the Tribeca, Toronto, and Berlin Film Festivals, has won two Webby Awards and is nominated again this year. Stacey's documentary credits include a half hour special for VH1 about Pearl Jam's iconic album "Ten" and the foreign language short documentary *Life for a Child*, which premiered at the Tribeca Film Festival, and won the award for Best Short Documentary at the 2009 Cinequest Film Festival. She has also edited a variety of webisodes for the Chicago Bears' Jay Cutler about his struggle with diabetes and a variety of webisodes for GQ.com. She won a Best Commercial Emmy working with artist Mac Premo on an Atlantic Art Walk Public Service Announcement.

### **Alex Bingham, Art Director**

Alex Bingham is a visual artist who works in a variety of media: painting, glass, photography and video. Alex recently finished editing a series of short films for MOMA and Parsons' "Headspace: On Scent as Design", and is currently working on a glass panel based on layered video stills. Alex's editing clients include: DKNY, Tommy Hilfiger, Conde Nast, Estee Lauder, Popular Mechanics, Chanel, Ralph Lauren, Channel 13, BBC America, MTV.

## **Filmmaker Q & A with Director/Producer Laura Israel**

### **How does your background as an editor inform your process as a documentary filmmaker?**

As an editor, I feel that the most important aspect of a film is the cinematography. Film is a visual medium; if the story is compelling, but the visuals are not interesting, I feel cheated. That said, it's not as if I evaluate a film based on the technical proficiency of its photography, but a film's images are the foundation for illustrating and conveying what the film is truly about. Of course, there is so much that can be added in post-production, but it is much more exciting for an editor to be able to work with truly amazing raw footage.

### **What prompted you to leave the edit bay and get behind the camera for the first time?**

I felt compelled to experience the process of starting with an idea and seeing it through to the end. With the advent of HD, it seemed possible to do it in a way that could look good as well as be fairly accessible. I felt comfortable with a small crew and what I thought was a simple subject. I knew Autumn Tarleton, Stacey Foster and Brian Jackson from working on commercial jobs and I was certain we would work well together and all gain something from the experience. In the beginning, I thought we were making a fifteen to thirty minute film. Once we started to interview people and do research, the subject started to unravel and we realized this needed to be a feature-length film in order to convey all the complexities, and not give in to obvious assumptions. In the end, this could have been an eight-hour film, but of course that was not realistic.

One aspect of the subject of wind energy that appealed to me is the idea that it is not what it seems. I wanted the film to drive people to ask questions, and not lead the viewer into believing that he or she would get all the answers. Information about wind energy can be overwhelmingly boring, so the challenge was to give the audience just enough material to motivate them to continue further research their own.

### **There is a palpable humanity to your film. How do you go about working with your subjects?**

I genuinely enjoy talking to people, that was one of the big reasons to get out of the editing room. I really enjoyed the experience of going into someone's house, trying to see life through his or her eyes for a moment. Sitting with them in their kitchen having coffee, waiting for the equipment to be set up – this was my favorite part of the whole process. Also, as an editor I was pretty aware to let people finish their sentences and not just try to get them to meter out sound bites that add up to points I'm trying to prove. There's always the story you're trying to tell and the one that creeps in there between the lines. Sometimes those underlying themes become just as important to the film if you're open to it.

**The look and editing of the film are remarkable. Talk a little bit about your visual approach.**

One of the things that struck me about the people of Meredith and of Tug Hill is their connection to the place, to the outdoors, the land. For farmers, it is all about the land. So we decided to shoot the interviews outdoors when at all possible. This made it difficult for sound as well as for lighting, but our wonderful DP Brian Jackson had a total appreciation for this being a climber and loving the outdoors. When we decided the beauty and solitude of the area is something we needed to convey, he totally took off with it and you can really feel a sense of the place in his shooting. He also does great time-lapse images in-camera. Instead of the usual time-lapse shots of people or cars obviously moving quickly, the images are more nuanced like a tree with leaves twittering, slightly etc. I find this way more interesting.

Then Alex Bingham, our brilliant art director, came up with the idea of a collage of maps to introduce people, to place them – as if you were driving to their house to meet them. The film has an aspect of defining and defending boundaries. Also, I hate to say it but once you've seen one tree, or one country road, you've pretty much seen them all, so we had to be careful about the over use of country footage that was too generic. Alex also created collages to represent the information collected and exchanged by the residents. These collages did contain research that residents gave us or told us about from the Internet, so again it was an illustration of their reality as it unfolds for them.

**A more obvious filmmaker would have vilified the energy companies and established their on-screen presence more. Why did you make the choice to keep the energy company a shadowy entity?**

The departure point for *Windfall* was to make it entirely from the point of view of people from the community. The viewer learns about oncoming developments alongside the townspeople and become immersed in the process of discovery. *Windfall* is not an exposé about wind energy; it is a story about the experience of a community and how it is affected. The people in the town didn't have a lot of dealings with the wind companies—I needed to show that. The wind companies initially sent out salespeople to sign contracts, and afterwards became entirely scarce to the townspeople. People who signed wind contracts also had to sign confidentiality agreements so they couldn't talk to their neighbors about it as well. This created an air of secrecy and paranoia in the town. The wind developers were referenced as a source of information for the town board during the process of creating a wind ordinance for the town, but the developers didn't show up at the public town meetings. If they had, they would have been in the film. At one point, Meredith town supervisor Frank Bachler even asks, "Where are the wind companies, why aren't they here?" What we do see represented in the film is the prevailing information we all receive from the industry's standpoint – which is the common view most people in the film started with until they did more research.

There are many people living among wind turbines all over the world trying to get the word out about their troubles and can't seem to find an outlet to make people listen. I'm

more concerned about giving voice to them, because they are the ones who aren't being heard.

**At the core of the crisis is the concept that the small pastoral landscape is being quite literally scarred by these monolithic creatures. Did you ever feel as if you were making a science-fiction film?**

The editing decision to hold back on revealing the town of Tug Hill, a town that accepted industrial wind energy, until the latter part of the film was actually a reflection of our experience as filmmakers. We wanted to wait until later in the shooting to film a wind facility as we experienced it – Autumn, Stacey, Brian and I. At that time, we hadn't seen a wind facility firsthand so we thought there might be just a bit of hysteria in the Meredith residents' fear of turbines. We felt a bit of suspense—they can't really be that bad, will people really have to move away if the wind project is approved? We weren't convinced...yet.

We stayed at the Flat Rock Inn when we arrived at Tug Hill, where you can see most of the 200 turbines from the front porch. We drove for miles and looked at turbines, we slept and woke up among the turbines for 4 days. The end of the film tries to convey that experience. I tried to cram as many turbine shots into the final 20 minutes of the film as I could. I was trying to show what it is like to live there and never see a view without turbines in it. When you look out of any window in the Flat Rock Inn, you see turbines. When you look in the rear view mirror of your car, you see turbines. When you look at a reflection in a puddle, you see turbines. When I closed my eyes to go to sleep, I saw turbines spinning. They did start to take on the characteristics of the creatures from War of the Worlds when you realize you're surrounded by them, they've taken over the landscape.

Someone complained to me that the turbines in the film look too pretty, why not try to make them look ugly? I think it's wrong to reduce the discussion of the problems to whether or not you like the view; this trivializes the more serious consequences of wind energy. And why not represent something beautiful that has a dark side to it? I find this way more interesting. There is also the consideration of scale and numbers. One turbine spinning gracefully and surrounded by billowing clouds is very elegant. It feels like man and nature, working together. Multiply that by 50 turbines, 100 turbines, 200 turbines towering over trees and houses it's something quite different. You're in the middle of an industrial wind facility. Then you realize you've only been here four days, these people have to stay and live here.

**What was the most surprising thing you learned about wind energy during the making of the film?**

What it's like to stand close to a 400-foot tall operating wind turbine and look up to see the huge blade come slicing through the air down toward you. I'll never forget the feeling in my chest the first time stood really close to one.

**Is there any interesting or noteworthy footage that was left out of the film?**

There was a really beautiful (but long) description by Meredith planning board chair Keitha Capouya about the Catskills during the years when the New York City reservoirs were built. Many people don't know this, but they condemned towns and filled them with water to make the NYC reservoirs. Most of the men employed to work on these projects were residents of the towns being destroyed, many of them veterans recently returned from World War II. Whole families were displaced, local industries were closed; the lives they anxiously returned to would change forever. Keitha described these men working in one area and then watching as the water rose up past the rooftops enveloping the first town. Then they moved on to the next town and water rose up, following them as they worked. This continued until the lives they knew were totally immersed behind them, one town after another. What a beautifully sad image that conjures up.

**What are you hoping audiences will take away from the film?**

Any time a multi million-dollar project gets fast-tracked with very little scrutiny, while the bulk of information about the project is being supplied by the developer and is solely positive, it should raise some red flags. If a good amount of people are experiencing health problems resulting from an industry, these people should not be ignored or told they are imagining things, the industry should be held accountable to do studies and correct the problems. If bats are dying at an unprecedented rate around wind facilities, then these facilities should work with scientists and give them full access to do studies and the industry should be held accountable to mitigate the problem.

Residents in proposed industrial wind project areas should not be intimidated and called names if they question corporations involved in the development. Public officials making decisions about regulating these projects should not have a personal financial interest. Citizens should have access to unbiased information in order to make informed decisions and take part in an open and honest democratic process concerning the future of their communities. I really don't think any of these concepts are unreasonable.

**And finally, who are some of your filmmaking influences—for both documentary and narrative?**

Narrative: Antonioni, John Cassavetes, Lina Wertmuller, David Lynch; Documentary: Errol Morris, Agnes Varda (I should also add that I'm a total sucker for any Busby Berkeley movie.)

### **Windfall has screened at the following film festivals:**

Toronto International Film Festival \* Doc NYC (Grand Prize winner) \* Vancouver International Film Festival \* Woodstock Film Festival \* Hot Springs Documentary Festival \* International Documentary Festival of Amsterdam Green Screen Competition \* Mountaintop Human Rights Film Festival \* Talking Pictures Festival (Honorable Mention) \* Environmental Film Festival DC \* Martha's Vineyard Film Festival

### **Additional Resources**

#### **National organizations**

Industrial Wind Action Group: [www.windaction.org](http://www.windaction.org)

National Wind Watch: [www.wind-watch.org](http://www.wind-watch.org)

American Wind Energy Association: <http://www.awea.org/>

National Renewable Energy Laboratory "20% Wind in 2030":

[http://www.nrel.gov/features/20080501\\_wind\\_energy.html](http://www.nrel.gov/features/20080501_wind_energy.html)

#### **Local organizations**

Virginia Wind: [www.vawind.org](http://www.vawind.org)

Western Catskill Alliance: <http://www.westerncatskillpreservationalliance.org/>

Better Plan, Wisconsin: [www.betterplan.squarespace.com](http://www.betterplan.squarespace.com)

#### **Europe**

European Platform Against Windfarms: <http://www.epaw.org/>

Views of Scotland: <http://www.viewsofscotland.org/>

#### **Specific topics**

Bat Conservation International – link to Bats & Wind Energy:

<http://www.batcon.org/index.php/what-we-do/bats-and-wind-energy.html>

American Society of Mammalogists Unanimous Resolution:

Effects of Wind-Energy Facilities on Bats and Other Wildlife:

<http://www.mammalogy.org/committees/commresolutions/WindEnergyResolution.pdf>

"The sound of high winds: the effect of atmospheric stability on wind turbine sound and microphone noise," van den Berg dissertation, University of Groningen, 2006:

<http://dissertations.ub.rug.nl/faculties/science/2006/g.p.van.den.berg/?pLanguage=en&pFullItemRecord=ON>

Link to book "Wind Energy Syndrome" by Nina Peirpont, MD, PhD:

[http://www.kselected.com/?page\\_id=6560](http://www.kselected.com/?page_id=6560)

Infrasound entry in Wikipedia: <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Infrasound>

**End Credits**

<b>Director / Producer</b>	Laura Israel
<b>Director of Photography</b>	Brian Jackson
<b>Producer</b>	Autumn Tarleton
<b>Co-Producer</b>	Stacey Foster
<b>Executive Producer</b>	Don Faller
<b>Production Services</b>	Doublewide Media
<b>Art Direction</b>	Alex Bingham
<b>Editors</b>	Laura Israel, Stacey Foster, Alex Bingham
<b>Assistant Editor</b>	Chelsea Smith
<b>Assistant Camera</b>	John R. Larson
<b>Animation</b>	Deen Modino
<b>Voice Over</b>	Chuck Coggins
<b>Soundtrack Composer</b>	Wade Schuman
<b>Music Supervisor</b>	Olivier Conan
<b>Music</b>	Hazmat Modine, Barbès Records
<b>Sound Mix</b>	Margaret Crimmins, Greg Smith, Raphael Lyon
<b>Titles</b>	Jane Nisselson
<b>Additional Cinematography</b>	Stacey Foster, Autumn Tarleton
<b>Meredith Election Party Footage</b>	John Miglietta
<b>Public Meeting Stills</b>	Derek Wiesenhahn
<b>Shadow Flicker Footage</b>	Gerry Meyer, Larry Wunsch
<b>Color Correction</b>	Scot Olive, Michael Dwass
<b>Post Production Assistants</b>	Vic Sorvino, Gina Broere, Wendy Mays, Gary Luk, Katherine Mendoza
<b>Legal Services</b>	Karen Shatzkin, Shatzkin and Mayer, P.C.
<b>Distribution Advisor</b>	Josh Braun / Submarine Entertainment

## Select Press

[http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/archives/doc\\_ny\\_windfall\\_a\\_great\\_expose\\_on\\_wind\\_turbines/](http://blogs.indiewire.com/theplaylist/archives/doc_ny_windfall_a_great_expose_on_wind_turbines/)

**indieWIRE** BLOG NETWORK

---

# THE PLAYLIST

---

## DOC NYC: ‘Windfall’ Is A Great Exposé On Wind Turbines

The ultimate failure of politi-docs (those taking aim at political issues and current events) are a) their strict adherence to an audience that already knows everything they’re talking about, or (b) that already agrees with their viewpoint from the get-go. The end product and subsequent viewing experience are nothing but a smug-fest, with no minds changed and no one charged to do anything different. The worst thing is, those who could actually learn a thing or two won’t see it because of its nasty attitude. This isn’t just a “liberal” problem, it happens on both sides of the coin, and rarely do we ever get a movie that offers both sides of an argument or one singular side of why people think a certain way that isn’t coated with some sort of bitter condescension.

“**Windfall**,” by first time filmmaker **Laura Israel**, thankfully does the latter, offering up several reasons on why wind-derived power isn’t such a great idea. The setting is a small, once-prominent dairy town in upstate New York, and the film details a wind-energy company coming in and offering land-owners opportunities to help do their part in ending our dependence on fossil fuels. Some are naively accepting, as these wind turbines seem like nothing but a good idea, but others are a bit more questionable about the process. They decide to get together and do some heavy research, and what they find is way more than it just being an ugly sight to some.

The construction of the towers requires roads that are able to handle the 400,000-pound materials, so sometimes new roads will have to be made simply to erect the thing. They’re also always at work, and the spinning blades emit much racket and vibration, which will cause folks that are nearby (aka everyone in the community) sleep loss. That combined with the immense shadows they cause in the streets and in houses (with the outlines of the blades going in and out as they rotate), the danger of it throwing ice, and of it burning up and no one being able to reach it proves that no one could possibly be able to live next to these things and retain their sanity. Oh, and the noise it produces? Explodes bat lungs, leading to possible extinction. There’s a surprisingly hefty amount of negatives to having these mass-produced company controlled energy spires, proving that the technology is far from ready.

There’s more than enough against current wind turbine technology, and the documentary also shines a light on green businesses being just like any other business, pretending to care but just interested in expansion and money. It’s a bit “No Shit!”, the nature of any business or corporation is to do just that, but these days most are taken in by the organic/green mindset and tend to

forget that they are most interested in a pretty penny and could very well end up like the industries we currently despise.

With all that said, Ms. Israel is never alarmist or patronizing, instead following the community (both sides, some who signed on for the turbines and others who didn't) as they divide amongst each other, with the anti-wind people eventually running for office to have a bigger say in what goes on in their town. She also doesn't paint the entrance of these monstrosities as totally negative, as when all is said and done, this led the community to the new beginnings that it ultimately needed. This includes starting an informative local paper, organizing and running for town board, and educating themselves about alternative energy. While it splits relationships, it also unifies others to act and introduce new things into their locale. The director is effectively subtle with these, presenting them naturally within the context of the film rather than tacking on in a voiceover or epilogue.

The exposé and community ideas are strung so tightly and effortlessly together that it's hard to believe this is a first-time filmmaker at hand. It's not without flaws, though: when focusing on pure information, the flow falters, feeling like a class lecture. The twangy music, particularly what could be considered the "theme-song," is also quite poor. Various time-lapse shots are employed, the wind ravaging whatever in frame back and forth frenetically. While it's nice to see this technique not used as a gimmick, the ideas it's meant to give off is frankly a bit hokey. All that aside, there's much restraint in the editing and direction of the entire project, avoiding snobbiness and instead focusing on humanity and the dangers of believing too much in big corporations, green or not. It's certainly not a game changer, but it's a breath of fresh air to know that a documentary filmmaker has something to say and isn't going to be a huge dick about it. [B+]

Windfall

Christopher Bell posted at 6:39 pm on October 27, 2010

<http://www.energytribune.com/articles.cfm/5414/Windfall-Documenting-the-Backlash-Against-Wind-Energy>

# Energy Tribune

Leading the debate. Beating the street.

## Windfall: Documenting the Backlash Against Wind Energy

By Robert Bryce

Posted on Sep. 29, 2010

On January 25, I got an email from Charlie Porter, a Missouri-based horse trainer. The issue: noise from wind turbines. His emails said that in 2007, a phalanx of wind turbines had been around his family's farm near King City and that "The overwhelming noise, sleep deprivation, constant headaches, anxiety, etc., etc., etc., forced us to abandon our home/horse farm of 15 years. We had to buy a house in town, away from the turbines and move!"

I called Porter immediately. What he told me was like a bolt from the blue. His 20-acre farm was, he said, "surrounded by lots of acres that nobody lived on." He was training quarter horses, and having good success with it. But the wind turbines, the closest of which was installed 1,800 feet from his home, changed the life his family had grown to love. The noise from the turbines "just ruined life out in the country like we knew it.... We never intended to sell that farm. Now we couldn't sell it if we wanted to."

I immediately began researching Porter and his background. I double checked everything he told me. I talked to the Gentry County tax assessor's office to verify his property records, including his claim that he'd had to buy a house in town to escape the noise. Everything checked out. I also began looking at the health effects that Porter described, symptoms that are now known as "wind turbine syndrome" – a term created by Dr. Nina Pierpont, a Malone, New York-based physician who has studied a number of people, like Porter, who are suffering ill health due to the noise from wind turbines.

Since then, I've talked to, or corresponded with homeowners who've had wind turbines built near their homes in Wisconsin, Maine, New York, Nova Scotia, Ontario, the UK, New Zealand, and Australia. All of them used almost identical language in describing their dislike of the wind turbine noise and the deleterious health effects the noise has had on them. [And I've written a number of articles about the issue.](#)

That's a long introduction to this review of [Laura Israel's new documentary, \*Windfall\*](#). But as I watched the film, I realized that nearly all of the issues that Israel exposes on the screen are ones that I've been hearing about in my own research since Porter contacted me in January.

Israel's documentary, which premiered at the Toronto Film Festival earlier this month, focuses on the wind industry's attempt to build a number of turbines in Meredith, New York. Israel, who owns a cabin in the town, interviews local residents and lets viewers see how the town gets bitterly divided over the issue of permitting the turbines. Some large landowners favored the siting of the turbines, in part because they were going to get royalty payments from the wind industry. That faction was led by the town's long-time supervisor, Frank Bachler, who is portrayed as a well-intentioned man who, in favoring the wind development, is only trying to help the area's struggling farmers.

But a majority of the townspeople opposed the turbines. The resulting battle for control of the town's board provides a textbook example of democracy in action. After the board voted to approve the siting of turbines, three wind opponents ran for election to the town board with the stated purpose of reversing the existing board's position on wind. In November 2007, [the opponents won and quickly passed a measure that effectively banned industrial wind development in the town.](#)

Israel's film provides a much-needed view of the growing backlash against the rapid expansion of the wind industry. One of the best examples of that backlash includes her interview with Carol Spinelli, a resident of Bovina, New York, a small town located a few miles east of Meredith that has imposed a ban on industrial wind development. Spinelli led the fight against wind turbines in Bovina, and she declares that the controversy is about "big money, big companies, big politics." Discussing wind developers, she says "I refer to them as modern day carpetbaggers. And that's what they are."

Israel also talks to a few homeowners who live near large wind projects. One of them, Eve Kelley, uses language much like what I'd heard in my own research into the infrasound problem caused by turbines. The noise from the turbines, says Kelley, led to "dizzy spells, sick to my stomach... Sounds like the noise is in the walls. The house is vibrating." Another person, a Canadian schoolteacher named [Sandy MacLeod](#), tells Israel that the noise meant "night after night without sleep...Heart palpitations."

Israel doesn't include any interviews with representatives from the wind industry. Instead, she tells the entire story through interviews with the local people. That lack of a defense of the industry may seem unfair. But even the supporters of the wind development in Meredith are perplexed by the lack of support from the industry. At one point during a hearing on the wind turbine controversy, Bachler asks the crowd, and no one in particular, ["Where are the wind companies, why aren't they here?"](#)

This is an important documentary but it's not perfect. I would have preferred fewer on-camera interviews. The cast of characters is, in my view, too big. And the film could have been 10 minutes shorter with no reduction in its overall impact or importance. Nevertheless, it's a tremendously important documentary, an outstanding piece of independent journalism. The wind industry will no doubt try to dismiss *Windfall* as a piece of anti-"green" energy agitprop. But the controversies over wind energy development that Israel exposes in Meredith are not going away. Indeed, as the wind industry continues its breakneck expansion here in the US and around the world, the number of controversies like the one in Meredith, along with the number of mad-as-hell landowners like Charlie Porter, will only increase.

<http://www.filmmakermagazine.com/news/people/laura-israel/>



## Laura Israel

Laura Israel cut her teeth editing experimental works, commercials and music videos while still a film student at NYU. She shifted her focus from directing to editing, and from cinema to video. By the time she graduated she had formed her own New York City company, Assemblage. Her client list reads like a hipper-than-hip door list: John Lurie, Lou Reed, Patti Smith, Keith Richards, Sonic Youth, New Order, Ed Lachman and especially over the last two decades, her good friend Robert Frank with whom she has been archiving and preserving his film and video work over the past two years.

But in recent years the feature-directing bug bit the 53-year-old Israel. "I think directing a film is a positive way to get through a mid-life crisis, don't you?" she asks with a winning grin. "I had become fascinated with experiencing a project from the initial idea through to the editing. I wanted to reverse my [usual] involvement in the process and focus on the departure point for the project before even beginning to work. In fact, I would really like to move on to directing a narrative, because that will take this experience to yet another level."

She seized the opportunity to direct when a town-splitting controversy over wind energy erupted in the small Catskills community of Meredith, in Delaware County, one of the five poorest in New York State. ("No chi-chi boutiques there," Israel says.) That's where she has retreated on weekends for the past 20 years into a 16-foot by 16-foot cabin in the woods.

So she made the doc, *Windfall*, which premiered in Toronto and ended up garnering top prize at Doc NYC. The backdrop: Starting with the long-established town leaders, salesmen from an energy outfit in Ireland offered residents in this no-zoning town a relative pittance if they would let them build, on their private property, massive wind turbines: 400-foot high structures with 130-foot-long blades weighing seven tons that "whoosh" as they turn at 150 miles per hour.

Although she thoroughly questions the "greenness" of wind energy, and exposes the psychological and emotional hazards that the structures impose when too close to human habitats, she says she was not going for an exposé on the wind energy industry. She is more interested in the schism that disrupted the laissez-faire harmony in this sleepy community of ex-

and financially-threatened dairy farmers (pro) and weekenders and expatriates from New York City (con). “The film is shot entirely from the point of view of the residents,” Israel says. And how she and her d.p., Brian Jackson, shoots them! Outdoors, articulating their positions (no sound bytes here) against a bucolic natural landscape, with maps guiding us to their homes, bringing us into the picture and the conflict.

Ultimately the naysayers realized that their only recourse was to run a slate of new, more open-minded candidates in the upcoming municipal elections. Israel generates suspense by tracking the countdown to the vote. She heightens the narrative momentum with Deen Modino's animated stop motion, plucky music by Hazmat Modine and accelerating shots of the inherently cinematic windmills themselves.

Her next project turns out to be another doc, this one about Robert Frank. “His work incorporates poetry, music, theater, politics and New York City history. I want to try to reveal his creative process and his relationship with images,” she says. Israel has managed to uncover a space between splicing together someone else's vision and executing her own. — *Howard Feinstein*

<http://www.cinemablend.com/new/TIFF-Interview-Windfall-Director-Laura-Israel-Uncovers-The-Dark-Side-Of-Alternative-Energy-20560.html>



[7 Comments](#) published: 2010-09-09 07:50:01 Author: [Katey Rich](#)

*Today is the first official day of the Toronto International Film Festival, and I'll be hitting the ground running, seeing six movies today. It'll take me a while to even have the time to type up thoughts, but in the meantime I'll leave you with an interview I conducted before the festival, with the director of one of the documentaries premiering here. Keep coming back for much, much more TIFF 2010 coverage-- as soon as I escape a screening room, that is.*

Laura Israel had been working for as a film editor for decades when the subject that inspired her to direct her first film quite literally showed up on her doorstep. The New York-based filmmaker had spent years going up to a cabin in remote Meredith, New York without getting to know her neighbors, but when several people in town signed contracts allowing an industrial company to place wind turbines on their property, and several others opposed it, Israel found herself caught in a local political issue that resonated across the country.

The resulting documentary is *Windfall*, which premieres this week at the Toronto International Film Festival. In telling the story of Meredith Israel explores the largely hidden downside of allowing wind energy corporations to stake out land in American communities, installing 400-foot high wind turbines so near peoples' homes that residents complain of headaches and respiratory problems, not to mention the diminished property values and general noise of a giant turbine so near one's home. As the residents in Meredith duke out their concerns at town hall meetings, Israel and her crew also take us to neighboring Tug Hill, where dozens of wind turbines have already changed that small town forever. Israel doesn't claim to have all the answers about alternative energy and how to reduce our dependence on oil, but says that with *Windfall* she wants to inspire people to ask questions and look beyond the easy equation that "wind energy= clean energy= good." I talked to Israel about what inspired her to tell the story, how she's been in touch with other communities also looking for more answers about wind energy, and how making this film got her more involved with her neighbors than she previously expected. *Windfall* premieres this Friday, September 10th at TIFF.