



PROFILE

WANZEK CONSTRUCTION

PART OF A LOWER-COST SOLUTION

Wanzek Construction was hired to construct the Cimarron II Project Substation and the Buckner 345 kV switchyard (Sunflower Electric Power Corporation) near Cimarron, Kansas. (Photos courtesy: Wanzek Construction)

WANZEK CONSTRUCTION

FOUNDED

1971

HEADQUARTERS

West Fargo, North Dakota

WEBSITE

www.wanzek.com

As one of the first heavy industrial construction firms to move into renewable energy, Wanzek Construction aims to reduce maintenance costs to owner-operators.

By WIND SYSTEMS STAFF

The cost of maintaining wind turbines is a growing concern to owner-operators and often the main threat to profitable operations. But the renewable services division of Wanzek Construction is focusing on ways to minimize that expense.

“A lot of the wind industry’s installed base dates back to 2007 and 2008,” said John Nichols, Wanzek’s senior director of Business Development. “They’re reaching the 10-year mark, and their Original Operations and Maintenance contracts are expiring. That’s a big opportunity for owner-operators, who can use efficiencies gained in the last decade to renegotiate new agreements at a very competitive price. Wanzek has strategically positioned ourselves to be part of this lower-cost solution.”

Nichols said most renewable energy power purchase agreements are negotiated at a fixed price.

“Prices today are lower than they were 10 years ago,” he said. “Now owner-operators may be able to adjust their margins by remodeling their O&M agreements.”

ONE OF THE FIRSTS

Wanzek is based in West Fargo, North Dakota, and it was one of the first heavy industrial construction firms to move into the renewable energy field almost 20 years ago. Today, its renewable services division is experiencing major growth across the country, due not only to its long experience and insight into the technologies on which the industry is based, but also its record of finding innovative solutions to the issues that can plague power-generation projects.

Heavy cranes are essential for performing major repairs on wind turbines. Replacing turbine blades, main bearings, gearboxes, and generators all require a crane to be moved on-site, then removed when the task is complete. The cost of transportation, set-up, and tear-down affects operators’ decisions on whether to perform necessary repairs immediately or defer them, leaving the unit offline until a number of projects can be grouped to make the investment more cost-effective.

With a fleet of all-terrain, rough-terrain, lattice-boom crawlers and hydraulic truck cranes, Wanzek has earned recognition on the *American Cranes & Transport* magazine’s list of North America’s largest crane-owning companies. The company has strengthened its relationships with crane suppliers and large rental vendors. It has entered into long-term lease agreements to ensure access to essential heavy hydraulic equipment whenever and wherever the need arises.

NEED FOR CRANES

“Most sites need 350- to 600-ton cranes a couple times every

year,” Nichols said. “Advances in technology have improved turbine component design in recent years, which often makes it more cost-effective to replace certain elements sitewide, extending the life of a site by 10 years or longer.”

Decommissioning also will continue to require the use of heavy cranes.

Wanzek’s extensive crane fleet and expertise in engineering and planning for crane transport, rigging, heavy lifts and service are among the keys to the company’s growth in O&M.

“We’re growing exponentially,” Nichols said. “We’re looking to be in the top tier of service providers in this market space.”

Rob Lee, whom Wanzek named executive vice president earlier this year, agreed with Nichols’ optimism about the growth of renewable energy services.

“We have great expectations for expanding our operating groups in solar, EPC power, and renewable services, while maintaining our market share in wind,” he said. “We’re also actively tracking the oil and gas market as it recovers from its slow-down.”

WANZEK’S WIND PORTFOLIO

A heavy industrial contractor serving clients across North



Wanzek was the EPC contractor for this project. Eclipse Wind is a 200.1 MW wind farm consisting of 88 Siemens 2.3MW turbines and will interconnect with a transmission system at a 34.5kV to 345kV interconnection substation. The scope of work included 20.8 miles of roads and 41,263 CY of concrete.

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America, Wanzek provides construction services to the renewable energy, power, oil and gas, infrastructure and industrial sectors, as well as crane services and maintenance of operating plants. Today, wind projects represent the largest part of the firm's portfolio.

Nichols said that ensuring safety continues to be a central focus as the company grows.

"Maintaining a safe and productive work environment is important to our leadership team as well as our clients, he said. "We strive to be the best at all levels. Our mission is to partner with our clients to better understand their needs, provide valuable solutions, and reduce costs based on proven methods, techniques, and execution strategies. We do this through our commitment to safety, planning, execution, and teamwork."

This is an exciting time to be part of the renewables industry as the market mushrooms, according to Nichols.

"This is one of the fastest growing markets I've seen in the past 10 years," he said.

Nichols said he spent six years with Siemens Energy, Inc., before joining Wanzek in December 2016.

"We're seeing 25 to 30 percent year-over-year growth, he said. "The future is extremely bright for O&M in the renewable energy space."

Wanzek's leadership in the rental, operation, and transport of heavy cranes is part of its ongoing effort to make renewable energy more competitive overall against fossil fuels.

Innovations will help drive parity, according to Nichols, between natural gas and wind plants — and ultimately make wind even more favorable in comparison with fossil fuels' volatility due to environmental and outside political factors.

"Renewable power is clearly a big part of our future," he said. "We're building, expanding, and planning to be one of the top-tier service providers as the industry continues to develop."

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