

Clean Energy Boom Powers Texas

AUSTIN, Texas, October 8, 2007 (ENS) - Texans like to say that everything is bigger in Texas, and when it comes to wind power, they're right. Texas boasts the world's largest wind farm - FPL Energy's 735 megawatt, MW, Horse Hollow Wind Energy Center - and also the world's second largest wind farm - the 505 MW Sweetwater project owned by Babcock & Brown & Catamount Energy, both located near Abilene.

These giant wind power facilities are part of a renewable energy boom in Texas that is handing big checks to rural landowners. Texas landowners now receive an estimated total of \$9.5 million in annual royalty payments from wind farm operators.

A new report released by the nonprofit group Environment Texas shows that the Texas' renewable electricity standard is cutting pollution, saving money, creating jobs, and fueling a clean energy boom in Texas, as in the other 24 U.S. states that have passed similar policies.

The Texas standard was adopted by the state legislature in 1999, and required 2,880 MW of renewable electricity generating capacity - 2,000 MW from new resources - to be installed by 2009. It was signed into law by then Governor George W. Bush.

For the past two years, Texas has led the nation in wind energy with more than 3000 megawatts installed, the bulk of which has come since the passage of the RES in 1999.

Currently, more than 3,000 MW of renewable energy have been installed in Texas, putting the state well above its original 2009 requirement years ahead of schedule. As a result of this early success, in August 2005, the legislature increased the new capacity requirement to 5,000 MW by 2015.

According to the Public Utility Commission of Texas, there are "expressions of interest in constructing 24,511 MW" of wind generation in the coming years.

Renewable energy is also saving consumers money. According to the Wind Coalition, by displacing use of high cost natural gas, wind power saved \$476 million in wholesale power costs in Texas last year.

"Texans are already reaping the rewards for Texas' leadership on clean energy," said Luke Metzger, director of Environment Texas. "Thanks to the renewable electricity standard, clean energy is booming in Texas."

The new report, "Reaping the Rewards," documents the benefits that have already been achieved by states that have adopted renewable electricity standards and calls on Congress to establish a national renewable electricity standard as part of the energy bill now in negotiation in Congress.

America now generates twice as much electricity from the wind and the sun as it did just four years ago, the report shows, and Environment Texas says RES policies have been among the most important factors in encouraging the development of renewable energy.

The report found that RES states are leading the way in renewable energy development. In 2006, more than two-thirds of all new renewable electric generating capacity in the United States was built in RES states.

In 2007, renewables account for about 38 percent of planned capacity additions in RES states, compared to just 12 percent in non-RES states.

The environmental community has called for four priorities on a national energy bill - a strong renewable electricity standard; strong fuel economy standards; no incentives or mandates for liquid coal; and improvements to the biofuels sections of the bill.

"Without an RES, one of our top priorities is missing from the Senate energy bill, and we will be hard pressed to support a bill without this key policy," said U.S. PIRG Washington DC office director Anna Aurilio.

In order to expand the benefits of renewable energy development, the report concludes that the United States should adopt a renewable electricity standard requiring at least 25 percent of America's electricity to come from new renewable sources by 2025.

This summer, the House passed a national RES that would establish a 15 percent requirement. The Senate also passed energy legislation this summer, but did not include an RES. The Senate can accept the House RES when the two bills are negotiated in conference this fall.

On Capitol Hill, Democratic and Republican energy committee staffs are conducting a bipartisan and bicameral exploration of the House (H.R.3221) and Senate (H.R.6) energy bills. The meetings are alternating between House and Senate.

Senate Energy Committee Chairman Jeff Bingaman of New Mexico believes that these bipartisan meetings are a necessary first step in producing a final comprehensive energy bill.

"After a decade of leadership in the states, it is time for Congress to follow," said Metzger in Texas. "The House has taken an important step in the right direction by passing the RES, and the Senate should join them. In addition to strong fuel economy improvements and energy efficiency provisions, no energy bill will be complete without a national renewable electricity standard."