

Small wind projects on the rise

By SAM LOWRY
News Reporter

The wind blowing through Klickitat County has stirred up interest, not only from big energy companies interested in multi-megawatt turbine farms but from wind-power promoters who prefer to think small.

One Washington group, which started work in Klickitat County to encourage use of wind for self-sufficient economic development, now finds itself partnering with an international organization and the local PUD to help defray energy costs for low-income households, using the wind's largesse.

Ed Kennell was in town the week before last, helping to hoist an elegant-looking yellow-and-white 10-kilowatt wind generator into place atop a 120-foot tower on the Caldwell-Davis farm, owned by Gwen and Fred Bassetti near Luna Butte east of Goldendale.

Kennell, owner of Clean Energy Products in Seattle



Photo by Sam Lowry

Ed Kennel (WHITE HAT), and Jonathan Lewis (RIGHT), ready a 10-kilowatt turbine for action at the Caldwell-Davis Farm.

and also a Klickitat County landowner, has been installing wind generators of various sorts and sizes locally for over 20 years.

"I'm on the mechanical side of things, where the rubber meets the road," Kennell said.

He mentions local ranchers he has helped introduce to

wind; the list includes some prominent names.

In fact, the last wind tower Kennell installed, in 2003, is visible from the Bassettis' place; it is on Kennell's own land near the summit of Luna Butte.

Placement of these two 10-kilowatt turbines was con-

ceived as part of the "Our Wind Co-op" (OWC) project launched in 2002 by the Seattle-based organization Northwest Sustainable Energy for Economic Development — "Northwest SEED" for short. The project's goal was to pave the way for more farmers, ranchers and other rural landowners to take advantage of the wind, there for the taking.

"Ten kilowatts is roughly what a farm uses," said Jonathan Lewis, whose Seraphim Electric company based near Goldendale served as electrical contractor for both the Bassetti and Kennell installations.

By installing a total of 10 turbines in rural Washington, Montana and Oregon, SEED hoped to show what state-of-the-art generators could do for farms.

"In the right locations, small wind is a viable option for the homes and farms of Klickitat County," in Lewis' opinion. He sang the praises of the yellow-and-white

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Bergey Exel unit, manufactured in Norman, Okla.

"It's the same as the old water pumping system," the sort of windmill that once dotted the west, Lewis said. An offset center causes the turbine to tilt itself away from wind over 36 mph. "Thirty-two is optimum, but there's no maximum. It'll run as long as the tower stays standing."

SEED's "Our Wind Co-op" project also had a second goal: to field-test arrangements with local power companies such as the Klickitat Public Utility District (KPUD), which are responsible for administering "net metering" laws.

These laws require utilities to deduct from turbine owners' energy bills the value of power they put back into the "grid," and to carry

surplus power balances forward for a year.

SEED was able to offer landowners another unique incentive, being the only organization in the Northwest authorized to purchase "green tags" from small wind producers. These direct payments, incentives to renewable-energy producers, usually go to big wind farms.

"That starts making these machines cost effective," Kennell said.

Even so, finding demonstration sites has proven to be a slow process, according to Heather Rhoads-Weaver, SEED's director of community partnerships.

SEED just learned on Friday that it had won a USDA grant, which Rhoads-Weaver hopes will permit the project's expansion to "20 pro-

ducer-members, generating 500 kilowatts or more."

It was while getting to work on the two Klickitat County projects that SEED approached KPUD about the potential use of net-metered power for low-income families, Rhoads-Weaver said.

The PUD's general manager, Tom Svendsen, and power manager Allen Barkley were in an expansive mood, she recounted.

"Tom and Allen said, how about we work together on a larger project?"

The result was a five-party memorandum of agreement signed this July between KPUD, SEED, its affiliated OWC, and the Klickitat-Skamania Development Council (KSDC) which administers KPUD's "Warm Heart" low-income energy program.

The fifth signatory was an organization called "A W.I.S.H.," short for A World Institute for a Sustainable Humanity. The group has legitimate reasons to call itself a World Institute; based in Bellingham, it is also incorporated in Germany, Uruguay, India, Greece and Bolivia.

Director Michael Karp calls A W.I.S.H.'s idea "community wind," just one of the organization's many projects, designed to foster local energy self-sufficiency in the face of mounting energy costs.

"We are working on renewable energy [sources] to reduce 'rate shock'," Karp said. "There is excitement nationally."

If a USDA grant comes through and matching donations and/or loans can be found, the five partners intend to build three 100-kilowatt

turbines on land belonging to KPUD atop the Goodnoe Hills. Rhoads-Weaver said she expects to hear about the grant within a week or two.

OWC's contribution to Operation Warm Heart could eventually amount to over \$55,000 per year.

"Low income people are forced to choose between paying their electric bill and buying food, medicine or meeting other basic necessities," the grant application stated. "This project would nearly double the number of households assisted."

According to Barkley, KPUD not only offered the land but helped prepare the grant application.

Svendsen calls his utility's stance toward the two projects "very supportive... We try to promote wind power any way we can in Klickitat County."