



Northwest Cooperative



Development Center

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Local Non-Profits Launch "Our Wind Co-op" to Promote Energy Independence for the NW

Farmers, Utilities, Consumers and Investors Invited to Participate

Olympia, WA (April 11) – A collaborative of non-profit organizations and utilities have announced plans to form a new wind power co-op in the Pacific Northwest with opportunities for rural landowners, urban consumers, investors, and wind turbine dealers.

The NW Cooperative Development Center (NWCDC) and NW Sustainable Energy for Economic Development (NWSEED) are in final negotiations with the National Renewable Energy Laboratory (NREL) for funding to help launch "Our Wind Co-op," which will coordinate the installation of at least 10 small wind systems on farms, ranches and rural facilities over the next 18 months.

"With Earth Day around the corner, people across the Northwest are asking what they can do for a cleaner, healthier Northwest," said Jim Perich-Anderson, Director of the Earth Day Network's NW Climate Campaign. "By purchasing efficient, earth-friendly Green Power, either through this new Our Wind Co-op, the Bonneville Environmental Foundation, or their own utility, consumers can show their commitment to energy resources that benefit both the region's economy and the global climate," he added.

The initial goal of Our Wind Co-op is to demonstrate that distributed, locally owned wind turbines producing power to meet local loads are feasible and cost-effective throughout the Northwest. The wind turbine model that will be installed on most host sites, the 10-kilowatt Bergey Excel, generates enough electricity (approximately 1200-1600 kWh per month) to offset a considerable portion of the electricity load of a farm or ranch.

“Ultimately Our Wind Co-op will help remove barriers to widespread distributed, locally-owned wind energy development in the Pacific Northwest through innovative partnerships, technical support, outreach, and informed dialogue with motivated farmers and consumers,” explained NWSEED executive director Heather Rhoads-Weaver.

To date more than 50 interested landowners, investors, installers, and host utilities have responded to the co-op interest survey. NWSEED encourages anyone interested in participating at any level to submit a pre-application form, downloadable from www.nwseed.org, by April 30.

“We’d love to see these initial 100 kilowatts grow to at least a Megawatt of dispersed, clean generation – with hundreds of farms powered by small wind turbines throughout the region – by 2005,” noted Rob Harmon, Vice President of the Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF), a major project sponsor.

The farm-scale wind systems distributed across the Northwest will be linked in part through the sale of “Green Co-op Tags” to BEF. Green Tags, representing the pollution offsets of clean energy generation, are a new way to support renewable facilities that are independently reviewed and endorsed by leading environmental groups.

Purchasing Green Tags through Our Wind “Buyer’s Co-op” will support economic growth in rural economies in the Northwest as well as an environmentally friendly energy source. These sales will provide a significant revenue stream for the project, which is particularly important here in the Northwest where retail electricity costs are still well below the national average. Earlier this week, BEF also announced a new partnership to kick-start customer-owned solar installations with Green Tags through a co-op. As many as 30 solar systems on homes and businesses will be included in the first phase of this new NW Renewable Energy Cooperative project.

Our Wind turbines’ energy production will be monitored and reported and a project web site will allow Co-op members and the general public to observe how well each turbine is performing. Wind turbine host sites will be selected through an application process, which will involve screening sites based on the recently released high-resolution wind maps of the Pacific Northwest, guidance from the project advisory committee, and public visibility. The project will include hands-on trainings on wind turbine siting, installation and ongoing maintenance, with the first tower-raising session planned for April 30-May 2 near Wenatchee, WA.

In addition to NWDC, NWSEED, BEF, and NREL, Our Wind collaborators include the Next Generation Energy Coop, Climate Solutions, Renewable Northwest Project, members of the Last Mile Electric Cooperative, Bergey Windpower Company, and numerous other project partners. Most of the project sponsors, including Northwest SEED, are part of a wave of new organizations fostering wind and other renewable energy development in the region, which have formed since Earth Day 2000 when climate change and renewable energy was the worldwide theme.

In the US, wind power and other renewables are now gaining more attention with rising energy costs and national security concerns. "A diverse supply of energy resources is critical to stabilize domestic energy prices and protect national security," advised Rhoads-Weaver. "Due to their distributed nature, renewable energy resources are less vulnerable to market forces and terrorist attacks."

The emerging prominence of clean energy – energy efficiency, wind, solar, and other renewable energy sources – is welcome news to energy activists who are preparing upcoming Earth Day events. Various Earth Day events will have a clean energy focus – including a Solar, Wind and Renewable Energy Exposition in Pasco, Washington, hosted by Franklin County PUD on April 20; a Renewable Energy Fair at Earth Day Puget Sound Event in Seattle on April 21; and the April 28 Earth Day Expo and Race to Stop Global Warming in Portland, Oregon.

Earth Day Network was founded to carry on the spirit and actions of the very first Earth Day in 1970. Today, Earth Day Network includes more than 5,000 organizations in 184 nations and more than 90,000 K-12 educators in the United States. Our mission is to promote a healthy environment and a peaceful, just, sustainable world by spreading environmental awareness through educational materials and publications, and by organizing events, activities, and annual campaigns. Our goal is to build broad-based citizen support for sound, workable, and effective environmental policies.

Pre-application forms for interested turbine hosts, utilities, installation contractors, investors and Green Tag Buyer's Co-op members can be downloaded at: www.nwseed.org/nswtc.asp

Green Tags to support new renewable energy projects can be purchased through the Bonneville Environmental Foundation at: www.greentagsusa.org

New wind power maps showing wind power potential throughout the Northwest can be found at: www.windpowermaps.org

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