Governor Schweitzer: Montana Selected for Wind for Schools Program

(HELENA) - The United States Department of Energy (DOE) has selected Montana as one of six states to participate in the inaugural year of the Wind for Schools Program.

“This important program will not only provide wind energy for rural Montana schools, but will also educate tomorrow’s leaders on the value and importance of this renewable energy source," said Governor Brian Schweitzer. "In addition, wind energy is American energy, produced by American workers. It decreases our dependence on foreign energy supplies and provides jobs here at home."

The goal of Wind for Schools is to engage rural communities in a discussion of wind energy while encouraging a knowledge and skill base for the industry. The program will serve as a platform for teaching renewable energy principles and opportunities by providing schools with educational curriculum and access to state-of-the-art technology. Other states selected to participate in the program are Colorado,Idaho, Kansas,Nebraska, and South Dakota.

DOE also funded the recent creation of the Wind Applications Center (WAC) at MSU-Bozeman to support Wind for Schools activities and to develop related coursework for engineering students considering a wind industry career. The MSU-WAC is expected to become a regional center for wind energy training, expertise, and outreach.

“I’m proud that our state is one of only six to be chosen for this program," commented Governor Brian Schweitzer. "It just goes to show that Montana is leading the nation in all types of wind energy development from community projects like this to industrial generation facilities.”

To supplement limited federal funding, NorthWestern Energy recently awarded a substantial grant to enable program activities in Cascade, Fairfield, Livingston, and Stanford school districts. The Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) has allotted funds from Montana-Dakota Utilities Co.’ Universal Systems Benefits Fund to help support the new Wind Applications Center at MSU-Bozeman.

Public support is now being actively sought to allow additional school districts to participate in the Wind for Schools program. Broadview, Joliet, and Glasgow have already been selected to become Host Schools, and other school districts will be able to join as funding allows. Besides financial contributions, in-kind support including electricians' labor, excavator time, concrete, and materials such as electrical wire and equipment are also needed. All donations are tax-deductible, and will earn recognition in regional media and on a permanent plaque to be placed at each Host School.

With consistent 25-30% annual growth over the last five years, wind energy may provide 20%

of the country's electricity by 2030. The DOE predicts Montana's wind industry alone could grow from its current 166 MW to 10,000 MW of installed capacity in the next 25 years. Among its benefits, increasing use of wind energy is widely regarded as a way to create jobs and economic growth in rural communities.

Western Community Energy (WCE) of Bozeman has been contracted by the DOE to serve as State Facilitator for Wind for Schools Montana. "Montana is rich with virtually untapped wind and human resources," comments Sean Micken, WCE's Host School Coordinator. "The DOE selected our state to participate in Wind for Schools because it sees the need and opportunity for Montana to become one of the nation's wind energy leaders. Only by directly engaging rural communities and young people can we hope to meet this challenge."

If you would like more information about Wind for Schools, or to discuss contributing to the program, contact Sean Micken at (406) 581-8460 or smicken@westerncommunityenergy.com. For more information on the Wind Applications Center at MSU-Bozeman, contact MSU-WAC Coordinator Robb Larson at rlarson@me.montana.edu.