

Embracing the Wind



Photo credit: Bob Gough, Intertribal COUP

Terry Fredericks, of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation and vice president of Intertribal COUP, after the recent installation of a 65-kilowatt wind turbine on the Fort Berthold Indian Reservation in North Dakota.

By Bob Gough

NativeEnergy sells renewable energy credits or “green tags,” which are vehicles for directing funds toward construction of energy renewal programs on tribal lands in the Great Plains.

The Intertribal Council On Utility Policy (COUP) is a nonprofit council of federally recognized Indian tribes in North and South Dakota, Nebraska, and Iowa, with affiliates throughout the Northern Great Plains. Founded in 1994, COUP provides a tribal forum for policy issues dealing with telecommunications and energy utility operations and services.

IF YOU LIVE on Indian reservations in the United States, you’re 10 times more likely not to have electricity delivered to your home than elsewhere in the United States. Realizing the growing need for electricity in this region, the Intertribal Council On Utility Policy (COUP) is presently assessing the wind potential on the Great Plains Indian reservations—where the wind energy resources are conservatively estimated to reach more than 530 billion kilowatt-hours annually.

At one time, a large share of the electricity in this region came from renewable hydropower. However, the regional electrical load growth over the past 50 years coupled with a persistent recent drought in the area have reduced hydropower’s contribution to the electricity mix to below 20 percent.

Lignite coal, a cheap, abundant, but extremely carbon-intensive fuel source, is now making up the balance. But coal is “cheap” only if you fail to account for acid rain, mercury pollution, or the carbon dioxide emissions associated with global warming and its potentially devastating economic impacts.

There is an exciting opportunity to recharge the national grid with renewable wind energy from Indian reservations in the Great Plains that would serve the dual purpose of contributing huge amounts of clean energy to the nation and bringing economic development to some of its poorest communities.

When you consider the fact that the average American home uses about 10,000 kilowatt-hours

**THERE IS AN EXCITING OPPORTUNITY
... WITH RENEWABLE WIND ENERGY
FROM INDIAN RESERVATIONS**

of power a year, the wind energy potential on America’s Indian reservations, conservatively estimated to be enough to power over 50 million homes annually, becomes even more appealing.

The COUP tribes are actively embracing this gift in the wind that blows on average in excess of 18 miles per hour across most of the Dakotas, Montana and Wyoming reservations. COUP has a bold plan to produce at least 3,000 megawatts of tribally owned wind power by 2015 on two-dozen reservations across the Northern Plains. This will help meet the Western Governors’ goal of 30,000 megawatts of new, clean energy generation over the next 10 years while building sustainable reservation economies based on renewable energy.

The Rosebud Sioux, a founding COUP tribe in South Dakota, has already sold a portion of its green power from a 750 kilowatt turbine to Ellsworth AFB through collaboration with Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) and Basin Electric Power Cooperative.

Rosebud has also pioneered the development of green power financing through the up-front sale of green tags (or renewable energy credits otherwise known as RECs) that represent the long-term environmental benefits of wind-generated electricity.

The broker in this case was NativeEnergy, which markets the tags to buyers wishing to reduce the country’s carbon pollution and financially support tribal renewable energy projects. A second COUP tribal project—a 65 kilowatt wind turbine, has just come on line on the Fort Berthold reservation of the Mandan, Hidatsa and Arikara Nation in North Dakota.

In August, Intertribal COUP took a majority equity position in the NativeEnergy company on behalf of its participating member tribes—a move that will support continued renewable energy development in Indian Country.

Through the separate sales of power and tags from the least cost renewable production, tribal projects can be integrated into the national energy market, providing utilities a cost-effective means to offer customers green power. Indian tribes and their partners will realize the commercial benefits of branding these tribal products. ☞

Bob Gough is secretary of the Intertribal Council On Utility Policy.

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