

Community, Commitment, Cooperation

Crow Lake Wind Project dedicated in South Dakota

By Tracie Bettenhausen and Daryl Hill



A dedication ceremony for the \$363-million Crow Lake Wind Project – the largest wind project in the United States owned solely by a cooperative – was held June 23 at the high school gymnasium in White Lake, SD.

The Crow Lake Wind Project is owned by PrairieWinds SD 1 Inc., a subsidiary of Basin Electric. The project is located about 14 miles north of White Lake.

South Dakota Gov. Dennis Daugaard spoke to a crowd of more than 300 people about what this project means for South Dakota. “In the past, wind power meant downed trees, snapped power lines and the lights going out. Now, wind power means having electricity to keep our lights on,” he says. “And thanks to the partnerships that helped make this project happen, South Dakota now has 162 more megawatts of wind generation power, more jobs, and an infrastructure to train new wind technicians.”

The ceremony was hosted by Ron Harper, Basin Electric CEO and general manager. He called the wind project an “industry trifecta” because it’s the largest wind project owned solely by a cooperative, it’s got a first-of-its-kind community wind investment partnership, and it’s being used to educate future wind technicians.

“Basin Electric’s first involvement in South Dakota began more than 30 years ago when we built the Spirit Mound Station just north of Vermillion,” Harper says. “Now, in 2011, that investment has grown tremendously. By the end of next year, energy investments in this state that have a Basin Electric ‘footprint’ (including the NextEra Energy Resources projects) will be about \$932 million.”

Kermit Pearson, South Dakota native and Basin Electric director from District 1, says as a rural electric consumer, he’s very proud of the investment Basin Electric and the rural electric family has made in the state. “The genesis of the project began more than 50 years ago when Basin Electric was formed as a power supplier. Since then, Basin Electric has grown. We now supply supplemental electricity to 135 member cooperatives in nine states,” he says.

Jeff Nelson, manager of East River Electric Power Cooperative, says the cooperative is pleased to be part of this coordinated project. “This affirms with our members, the cooperative’s commitment to include wind generation as an integral part of our power supply,” he says. “We are especially pleased to have played a pivotal role in helping to launch the South Dakota Wind Partners and Mitchell



Jim Headley, landowner in the project, was given a plaque of appreciation during the dedication for his part in garnering support for the Crow Lake Wind Project. Headley is an avid birder. Check Basin Electric's video gallery for a story on a bird tour Headley hosted within the wind project.

Technical Institute (MTI) ownership as first-of-a-kind local ownership models. As president of the South Dakota Wind Energy Association (SDWEA), we believe this project is a great step forward for SDWEA's mission of building a wind industry in South Dakota for the benefit of South Dakotans."

The entire project consists of 108 GE 1.5-megawatt turbines – 100 are owned and operated by PrairieWinds SD 1, one turbine is owned by MTI, and the remaining seven are owned by a group of local community investors called the South Dakota Wind Partners. PrairieWinds SD 1 constructed the turbines for the Wind Partners and MTI, and will operate and maintain them. PrairieWinds will also purchase the electricity generated by the eight turbines.

The Wind Partners investment opportunity became viable following passage of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act in February 2009. The act created a new tax grant option allowing small investors access to government incentives and tax benefits making public wind ownership possible. Basin Electric Class A member East River Electric, the South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation, South Dakota Farmers Union and the South Dakota Corn Utilization Council created the Wind Partners for that purpose.

Jim Burg, president of the South Dakota Wind Partners, talked about the importance of a project like this. "This first-of-its-kind



Roy Ireland, Basin Electric director - District 7; Cliff Gjellstad, Basin Electric director - District 3; Greg Von Wald; Jim Burg; Gov. Dennis Daugaard; Kermit Pearson, Basin Electric director - District 1; Jeff Nelson; and Ron Harper cut the ribbon at the dedication.

public wind power investment provides South Dakotans a great opportunity to become personally involved with helping to advance this green source of energy. The South Dakota Wind Partners is proud to be involved in this project and hopes others can utilize a similar business model that can incorporate local investment into similar future projects," he says.

The turbine sold to MTI will be used as part of the school's Wind Turbine Technology program, which launched in 2009. Through a grant, stimulus bonds, GE support and the South Dakota Governor's Office of Economic Development, MTI purchased the turbine. The revenue collected from electricity sold will help cover maintenance costs and loan payments.

Greg Von Wald, president of MTI, says, "You simply cannot simulate in a lab the experience and confidence climbing this turbine provides for MTI students. There is no way to take a lab full of trainers and book knowledge and finish off these young students without the real-life experience of translating what they have learned in the lab to the real-life components of this wind turbine." He says the availability of this turbine to MTI came about because a lot of good organizations and good people got together to make it happen because they saw the possibilities – and it was not easy to get that done.

Construction on the Crow Lake project began Oct. 5, 2010. The wind project was placed into full operation in February 2011.

On the web

Check out Basin Electric's video gallery for a report from the dedication ceremony. Also, check out Basin Electric: The Flip Side for interviews done by local high school junior, Hailey Mohnen: <http://bit.ly/ReportsFromCrowLake>.