

Crow Lake captures title

By Andrea Blowers



It's an industry trifecta. The Crow Lake Wind Project, built by Basin Electric subsidiary PrairieWinds SD 1, Inc., is complete and operational with three significant achievements to boast. 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.

According to Ron Rebenitsch, Basin Electric manager of alternative technologies, the last turbine of the \$363-million wind project just east of Chamberlain, SD, was commissioned Feb. 27 and the entire project is now fully operational.

With 150 of the project's 162 megawatts owned by PrairieWinds SD 1 the Crow Lake project has overtaken the title as the largest wind project in the nation owned solely by a cooperative. The title was most recently held by the PrairieWinds 1 projects near Minot, ND, built by Basin Electric subsidiary PrairieWinds ND 1, Inc. PrairieWinds 1 first took the title in late December 2009, when the 77-turbine project began operation.

Construction on the Crow Lake project began Oct. 5, 2010. Crews from contractors Wanzek and GE worked around the clock for nearly five months to complete it. "It's really amazing what Wanzek was able to accomplish in an incredibly short period of time, and finish the last towers in the middle of winter no less," Rebenitsch says. "I also want to thank Basin's engineering, environmental and construction team, who put in many long hours to support this accelerated construction process."

GE began commissioning the turbines shortly after construction started, and turbines were tied in, tested and cleared as they were built. The last turbine was topped out Feb. 9, 2011, and in the remaining weeks of February, the final turbines were commissioned.

The entire project consists of 108 GE 1.5-megawatt turbines – 100 will be owned and operated by PrairieWinds SD 1, one turbine has been sold to Mitchell Technical Institute, and the remaining seven owned by a group of local community investors called the South Dakota Wind Partners. PrairieWinds constructed the seven turbines for the Wind Partners and will operate them. Through PrairieWinds, Basin Electric will purchase the 10.5 megawatts of electricity produced from those turbines.

The Wind Partners investment is a first-of-its-kind partnership for wind development. The 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 to access government incentives and tax benefits making public wind ownership possible.

Basin Electric Class A member East River Electric Power Cooperative, the South Dakota Farm Bureau Federation, South Dakota Farmers Union and the South Dakota Corn Utilization Council created the Wind Partners for that purpose.

“This development model created opportunity for small local investors to have direct local ownership in wind energy and access the tax benefits previously reserved for large equity investors. It offers a model for others to participate in community-based wind projects,” says Jeff Nelson, East River Electric general manager.

The third crowning achievement of the project is its direct connection to training future wind technicians. One of the turbines in the project has been sold to Mitchell Technical Institute to be 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 school will sell the turbine’s output to Basin Electric. The revenue will help cover maintenance costs and loan payments. To learn more about this part of the project read the story, “Generating inspiration,” featured in the January-February 2011 issue of Basin Today, <http://bit.ly/GeneratingInspiration>.

“This wind project is certainly unique,” says Wayne Backman, Basin Electric senior vice president of Generation. “With the Wind Partners and MTI and all involved, it’s a great

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Though the Crow Lake project is operational, work at the site will continue into summer. Reclamation and cleanup will complete the project, Rebenitsch says. Roads and disturbed land

will be repaired and reclaimed and re-seeded. This will take several months, depending on weather conditions.

According to Rebenitsch, from beginning to operation, the project had its unique challenges, but the achievements speak for themselves – it’s the largest, it’s first-of-a-kind, and it’s educating the next generation. “That’s an impressive combination.”

A project dedication will be held this summer.

Crow Lake project wins award

In early February, the South Dakota Ready Mixed Concrete Association awarded the Crow Lake Wind Project the 2010 Excellence in Concrete award at the 9th Annual Joint Concrete Conference.

According to Jody Titze, South Dakota Ready Mixed Concrete Association executive director, the Crow Lake project won the award because the design, construction and aesthetics of the project exhibit quality from concept through completion. It also demonstrates the “strength, durability, cost-effectiveness, environmental benefits, and beauty that ready mixed concrete can contribute,” Titze said.

Winter Inc. supplied 34,279 yards of concrete for the project, a record amount for a wind project in South Dakota. Titze said two mobile batch plants on site supplied 24 trucks and seven concrete pumps.

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In their own words: Top out crew at Crow Lake Wind Project (Video) <http://bit.ly/CrowLakeTopOutCrew>

15,000th GE wind turbine installed at Crow Lake

GE announced in early February its 15,000th megawatt-class wind turbine was installed at the Crow Lake Wind Project. It’s the turbine owned and operated by Mitchell Technical Institute.

“We are pleased to know that this milestone turbine will help to support future green technology jobs and will be instrumental to the training of the next generation of wind turbine technicians,” said Victor Abate, vice president of renewable energy for GE Power & Water.

Watch a video telling the story of this turbine: <http://bit.ly/MTIStudentsLearnOnCrowLake>.