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## Local Headlines

### New emphasis on wind power

*By Tim Leeds/Havre Daily News/[tleeds@havredailynews.com](mailto:tleeds@havredailynews.com)*

Modern wind turbines are springing up in Montana, helping people, organizations and governments offset their electrical bills.

Jess Alger, who farms and ranches north of Stanford, is holding an open house today to dedicate a wind turbine he is using. Bison rancher Doug Nelson is holding an open house Wednesday to dedicate a wind turbine on his ranch near East Glacier. Our Wind Cooperative, based in Washington state, helped the ranchers get their turbines running.

Alger said last week his turbine is earning him a credit on his electric bill.

"It's running right now. It seems to be going good," he said. "The meter's running backward. That's what I like to see."

Liberty County also is joining the co-op, and will install a turbine to power a county shop soon. Liberty County Commissioner Don Marble said it took a lot of research and paperwork to get the project going, but he thinks it was worth it.

"We're pretty excited about it," Marble said. "It's quite a bit of work for what you get out of it, but it's a start. It's a demonstration project."

Climate Solutions of Olympia, Wash., and Northwest SEED, based in Seattle, are primary organizers of Our Wind Cooperative.

Climate Solutions outreach coordinator Peter Moulton said its efforts so far to set up turbines is just a beginning, and Our Wind Co-op will probably look at expanding membership and helping members install larger turbines in the future.

"This is just a model program, just to see what hurdles we have to go through," he said.

People who are close enough to a power grid, such as the grid used by NorthWestern Energy in Montana, may be able to send excess power generated back into the grid, receiving a credit from their power company.



Moulton said if enough excess is generated, it could be sold back to the company, but that is a complex process requiring additional agreements with the company.

Dennis McElwrath, superintendent of Anchor Academy north of Havre, said the academy is doing just that. The academy has installed two large turbines to offset its power costs, and is negotiating to sell any excess it produces to Basin Electric Power Cooperative, he said. The main purpose, he added, was to reduce the academy's bill, not make a profit.

One of the turbines was struck by lightning this summer, and its blades - each about 27 feet long - must be replaced. The turbines each save the academy about \$500 a month when they are running, McElwrath said.

Other people and organizations in the area are looking into using wind turbines to offset their power bills, including Rocky Boy's Indian Reservation. Roger St. Pierre of the Rocky Boy Housing Authority said the Chippewa Cree government is examining the idea.

Thom Wallace of Northwest SEED said the Liberty County turbine will be the fourth that Our Wind Co-op has helped to install. The co-op is working on five others in Washington and Oregon, and has been contacted by hundreds of people and organizations interested in small-scale turbines, he said.

One of the goals of the cooperative is to provide information for people who want to see if wind turbines are right for them, and also to help find and provide funding, Wallace said. One of Our Wind Co-op's goals is to create a revolving fund to provide low-interest loans to buy turbines.

Moulton said financing is one of the main obstacles for many people.

"You can pencil out how long it will take to pay for itself, but you still need the initial capital," he said.

"Small Wind Electric Systems," a publication of the U.S. Department of Energy, said a typical residential system costs from \$13,000 to \$40,000.

The director of the North American Rural Futures Institute said more and more opportunities are rising for people interested in harvesting wind, including low-interest loans, loan guarantees and grants provided for ag producers by the 2002 farm bill.

NARFI director Timlynn Babitsky said other private organizations and federal and state agencies, like the U.S. Department of Energy and the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, also offer financial help in researching and installing wind turbines.

It takes a lot of work to research the wind potential and find the best location for a turbine, she said. But, she added, there are many resources to help people find out.

She said that as windy as Montana is, wind turbines are of great interest to the institute. Havre-based NARFI was established to research and implement ways to preserve and improve life in rural America.

"It's just a really good thing for ranchers, farmers and towns," said Babitsky, adding that wind power could provide jobs and increase the local

tax base at the same time.

In other states, like Minnesota and Iowa, wind energy is considered a second cash crop by some ag producers, she said.

The wind available in Montana eventually could translate into major economic development, Babitsky said. The electricity shortage on the West Coast in 2001 illustrates the possibilities to export, she said.

"With California crying for energy, it's a huge means of revenue," she said.

"Wind power is becoming a very hot topic in Montana," Babitsky added.

Secretary of State Bob Brown sponsored a bus tour earlier this year to look at alternative energy for Montana, including wind energy.

Brown said today that he became interested in wind energy when he looked into its possible use on state trust land.

"In the process of meeting the nation's energy needs, it occurred to me that the state and the state trust lands could help in that," he said. "It's a real opportunity for Montana and an opportunity for rural Montana."

NARFI sponsored Kristie Smith of Havre to take the tour, and U.S. Bank president Shaud Schwarzbach represented Bear Paw Development Corp.

Schwarzbach said the tour stressed the potential much of Montana has for providing wind power. It would be especially helpful for people with higher-than-average electricity usage, like farmers and ranchers, he said.

"It's a wide and untapped resource, really," Schwarzbach said. "To offset their expense, it would be great."

On the Net: Our Wind Co-op: [www.ourwind.org](http://www.ourwind.org)

North American Rural Futures Institute wind power links:  
[narfi.org/resources/Rural\\_Futures/Energy/Wind\\_Power/](http://narfi.org/resources/Rural_Futures/Energy/Wind_Power/)

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