

## State wind industry asks Congress for energy standard

By Barbara Soderlin

December 30, 2009

SIOUX FALLS, S.D. – A group of South Dakota wind energy investors and developers on Tuesday called on Congress to set a national renewable energy standard they said would spur growth in the industry and bring jobs to South Dakota's rural communities.

A renewable energy standard would require utilities to get a certain percentage of their electricity from renewable resources, such as wind, solar, biomass or geothermal, as opposed to limited sources such as coal and natural gas. Twenty-eight states, not including South Dakota, already have state standards, but that's not enough, said those involved in wind power here.

"It's not going to go like it needs to go unless we have a national standard across the board," said Richard Morrison, chief executive officer of Molded Fiber Glass in Aberdeen. "The businesses have suffered because of the uncertainty of what the United States Congress will or won't do. That keeps the private money on the sidelines."

South Dakota is both windy and a great place to do business, said Sam Brown, president and chief executive officer of Knight & Carver Wind Group in Howard, but development won't really take off here without a known demand for wind power.

---

***"It leads to starts and stops in the industry that scare off investors. ... There's a significant amount of job creation that would occur if we were to get some more certainty in the business."***

---

"What we constantly run into is an inability to understand the needs of customers," he said. "It leads to starts and stops in the industry that scare off investors. ... There's a significant amount of job creation that would occur if we were to get some more certainty in the business."

Wind producers around the country have been calling for a standard for months, and South Dakota producers added their increasingly organized voices, led by Steve Wegman, longtime energy policy specialist in South Dakota.

Wegman is executive director of the South Dakota Wind Energy Association, organized this year and based in Pierre.

South Dakota gets 10 percent of its energy needs provided by wind power, Wegman said, the third highest in the country. The wind advocates said they'd like to see the national standard set as high as 25 percent.

Wegman said most of the wind development is taking place East River in part because, while windy, the western half of the state just doesn't have the population to drive development.

"On peak load day it barely equals the load in Minnehaha County," Wegman said. "You have to have customers to use the energy or you have to transmit it a further distance."

Wegman said, nationally, southern states have not supported a renewable energy standard because they rely heavily on coal and nuclear power. He said South Dakota's congressional delegation supports a national standard.

The speakers said bills are pending in the House and Senate that would create a national standard, but that the standards in both are lower than the actual projected renewable energy use and therefore not enough to spur much investment.

Andi Fouberg, a spokeswoman for Sen. John Thune, said Thune voted in 2007 for an amendment that would have created a 20 percent clean energy standard.

In Rapid City, about 8 percent of Black Hills Power's total capacity comes from wind energy, said Kyle White, vice president of regulatory and governmental affairs.

He said Black Hills Power is concerned about the details of legislation requiring a national standard and what the costs would be to the utility's customers.

"Generally renewables are more costly than traditional power supply resources," White said.

He would want a standard to apply fairly to all types of electric utilities and said incentives are preferable to mandates.

"Renewable energy, especially wind energy, has different availability depending on what parts of the country you're in," White said. "That kind of legislation would have to be pretty broad in its definition."

<http://www.rapidcityjournal.com/>