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Windfall for Green Energy in Iowa Wind Now Powers 15 Percent of Iowa Electricity

IOWA CITY, Iowa (April 13, 2009) — Right before Iowans' eyes, green-power generation already has reached levels only dreamed about 10 years ago, thanks to the growing use of wind power.

Estimates by the Iowa Utilities Board now indicate wind fuels about 15 percent of the electricity generated in Iowa — up from the 5 percent level estimated in 2006.

“Even those of us who keep up with the wind industry were amazed that around 15 percent of our total electric generation in Iowa is from wind power,” said David Osterberg, executive director of the nonpartisan Iowa Policy Project (IPP).

A new report from IPP — available at www.IowaPolicyProject.org — notes that while wind-turbine towers are more common on the northern Iowa landscape, the state has also regularly been among national leaders in wind production.

As of the end of 2008, the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) found Iowa was second in the nation in installed wind-power capacity. Iowa had installed 2,791 megawatts (MW) of capacity by year-end 2008, equal to 11 percent of the nation's total wind capacity.

IPP researchers said one lesson for Iowa is that — despite dire predictions in years past — increasing generation of power from wind has not cost consumers. The report noted the state's largest electric utility, MidAmerican Energy, has greatly expanded its commitment to wind energy and is close to operating or contracting for 1,200 megawatts of wind (18 percent of its production).

In addition, MidAmerican itself has noted its expansion since 2004 has come without raising electric rates and it has committed not to seek a rate increase to become effective before 2014.

“This demonstrates that expense is not a deterrent to our ability and need to address global warming,” said IPP Research Associate Teresa Galluzzo, who added energy efficiency also offers cost-effective strategies to respond to climate change.

Iowa's large share of wind in electricity production compares with Europe. According to AWEA, Denmark leads the world, producing more than 20 percent of its electricity from wind energy.

“The only country in the world that can claim even 20 percent of its electricity from wind power is Denmark,” Osterberg added, taking delight in that comparison because Iowa has the National Danish Immigrant Museum, in Elkhorn. “Something must have rubbed off!”

The Iowa Policy Project (IPP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and policy analysis organization in Iowa City. IPP reports are at <http://www.iowapolicyproject.org>.

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