

Meeting 1/01

10 January 2001

Not for general publication

Present: Marla McCombie (in the Chair), Lee Tavenner, Georgia Brensdal, Chris Daum, Chris Borton, Graden Oehlerich, Rus Van Duke, Luke Kovar, Claud Matney, Tim Ranf, Linda Welsh, John Walden, Charles Van Hook, Gail Snow, Charles Day, Beth Bernard, Dan Healy, Bob Anderson, Tony Boniface, Marla McCombie, Dave Ryan, Bill Bullock, Patrick Judge, Roy Nollkamper, Bill von Brethorst, and Jim Tracy.

Apologies: Jerry Spencer, Mikey Strickland

Minutes: Secretary Jim Tracy reported that there were no minutes from the organization meeting Nov. 29, 2000. The outcome was reported in a news release announcing the incorporation of the Montana Renewable Energy Association. The release (attached) stated the purpose of the organization, listed officers and board members, announced the first meeting and listed contact information.

Officer Reports:

President's report

"I think our timing could not have been better, starting up the association when we did," said MREA President Dave Ryan. "Renewable electric generation has always lost out to fossil fueled generation, until now, when new wind generation is competing handily with market prices. If all of you are getting telephone calls about new solar electric systems as I am, business is good, what are you all doing here? Seriously, I believe one of the most significant outcomes of year 2000 was the creation of MREA."

Ryan said that 2000 was "a learning year" for Universal System Benefits Charge programs and contractors. "Really it was the first full year we had to implement USB funding," he said. Results of the first year included 42 net-metered, grid-connected solar (and wind) electric generation systems ranging from about 1kw to 50kw. Ryan reported that more than 100 people, including many electricians, attended USB-sponsored seminars, and that additional seminars are scheduled. "In fact, we are already seeing 'free drivers,' people installing wind and solar electric systems without any incentives other than the net metering law," Ryan said.

He also reported on legislation under consideration in the 2001 Montana Legislature. Several bills concerned restructuring, including one to repeal restructuring. Other bills would have changed the complexion of USBC, while still others proposed changes in the net metering law.

Ryan urged the group to consider "mundane stuff." "We need to develop policy of our own, like do we use recycled paper?" he said. "Do we need a real office? How do we get funding? How do we increase membership? And the big ones, how do we grow the renewable energy market? How do we go to educators? What can MREA do to influence public policy?"

Treasurer's Report:

Treasurer Chris Daum reported that the association had \$1,055 in its account as of January 10, 2001. She also noted that she had opened an account at Farmers State Bank in Victor.

Secretary's Report:

Secretary Jim Tracy reported that MREA has received a federal employee identification number and notification from the Montana Secretary of State that it is officially incorporated as a non-profit public benefits corporation. Incorporation documents are on file with the Secretary of State.

Tracy also reported that the association is completing a lengthy Internal Revenue Service application for tax exempt status as a 501 (c) 3 non-profit, public benefits corporation.

New Business:

Sen. John Cobb (R-Augusta) introduced himself to the Association and requested help in learning about tax incentives other states offer to promote renewable energy. Cobb offered to work with MREA on legislation affecting renewable energy in Montana. Cobb said legislation he was drafting might include business tax exemptions, energy generation tax exemptions, tax credits and tax deductions and a revolving loan fund for renewable energy projects. He said he wanted to make sure any incentives to build new generation plants included incentives for alternative energy. MREA promised to gather that information and send it to Sen. Cobb. (A copy of a letter Cobb received in response to his request is attached.)

Committees Formed:

After a lengthy discussion, the Association agreed to assign members to the following committees:

POLICY

Tony Boniface, Bob Anderson, Rus Van Dyke and Georgia Brensdal

EDUCATION

Chris Borton, Gail Snow, Beth Bernard, Linda Welsh, Bill Bullock, Claud Matney, Graden Oehlerich and Jim Tracy

MARKET DEVELOPMENT

Dan Healy, Charles Van Hook, Tim Ranf, Rus Van Dyke and Chris Daum

FUNDRAISING/MEMBERSHIP

Luke Kovar, Georgia Brensdal,

EXECUTIVE

Dave Ryan, Marla McCombie, John Walden and Jim Tracy

MREA Question:

The Association agreed to keep its name and acronym – Montana Renewable Energy Association, or MREA, despite a conflict with another prominent renewable energy group. William von Brethorst of Planetary Systems in Ennis noted that “MREA” is also the acronym for the well-known Midwest Renewable Energy Association. The Montana association decided that it would not risk violating trademark law by keeping the acronym MREA. Ryan offered to inform the Midwest Renewable Energy Association that the Montana Renewable Energy Association had formed using the same acronym.

MREA Logo

Chris Borton of Sage Mountain Center passed around drawings he had made of potential MREA logos. The group agreed that the example that best exemplified the association included symbols depicting solar, wind, micro-hydro and biomass energy. Chris Daum of Oasis Montana Inc. volunteered the services of a graphic artist to turn Borton’s drawing into a logo.

Resolution Supporting Renewable Energy

The group discussed issuing a resolution to be used in support of legislation favoring and promoting renewable energy in Montana. It was moved by Public Service Commissioner Bob Anderson and seconded by Georgia Brensdal, a renewable energy specialist with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, that MREA issue the following resolution:

“In general, the Montana Renewable Energy Association supports any legislation, rule, or other public policy increasing the appropriate use of renewable sources of energy.”

The resolution passed unanimously.

In other business:

- ◆ Georgia Brensdal, a renewable energy specialist with the Montana Department of Environmental Quality, reported that a group representing wind energy development in North Dakota planned to visit Montana and hoped to meet with association members who are also interested in wind energy.
- ◆ Bill von Brethorst, owner of Planetary Systems of Ennis, urged the association to include energy conservation in its statement of purpose. Von Brethorst suggested that energy conservation should be the first consideration in any renewable energy project. Dave Ryan agreed that energy conservation is implicit in renewable energy development but wondered whether MREA should emphasize conservation since it is not part of the association’s stated purpose. The issue was left unresolved.
- ◆ Pat Judge, a lobbyist for the Montana Environmental Information Center, reported on pending legislation and offered to keep the group apprised of renewable energy developments in the state legislature.

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- ◆ Tim Ranf of Pioneer Technical Services Inc. reported on a possible wind energy project near Anaconda.
- ◆ The association set its next quarterly meeting for Wednesday, April 11, from 1-4 p.m. in the Director's Meeting Room at Montana Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ) Lee Metcalf Building, 1520 E. Sixth Avenue, Helena.