

Minutes of the Montana Renewable Energy Association
Quarterly Meeting, July 5, 2006
StrawHouse Market, Helena

Present:

Dave Ryan (NCAT), President and Board Member
Chris Borton (Sage Mountain Center), Vice President and Board Member
Chris Daum (Oasis), Treasurer and Board Member
Patrick Judge (MEIC), Secretary and Board Member
Mikey Strickland (Dearborn Electric), Board Member
Steven Aagenes (InSolar), Board Member
LuMarie Strickland (Dearborn Electric)
Kathi Montgomery (DEQ)
Tom Bishop (Sunelco)
Dirk Ellis (StrawHouse Market)
John Campbell (NorthWestern Energy)

President Dave Ryan called the meeting to order at 12:40 pm. He led a round of introductions.

Minutes: The minutes of the April 19, 2006 meeting were approved unanimously and with no changes.

Board Election: Kathi Montgomery suggested sending the ballot out to the general membership, due to limited attendance. Tom Bishop seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Patrick Judge did collect ballots from those present.

StrawHouse Update: Dirk Ellis reported that he has lined up an investor with a strong alternative energy portfolio, and that they are getting the bank back in-line. He hopes to reopen October 1st. Dirk still had the question about the mysteriously high electricity bill (\$150-\$200 per month, even though the building is not open and has small loads - computers / ground source heat pump). Dirk felt that the large solar array should be offsetting most or all of the bill. It sounds like a Demand Meter issue, and John Campbell agreed to look into it. Dirk observed that part of the challenge of a specialty store like his is competing with larger corporate stores, because organics has now gone mainstream (which is good). He said his store would offer specialty products, and continue to offer restaurant, coffee grinding, and retail services. He wants to appeal to families, preparing quality food on-the-go. He is also interested in doing presentations / seminars / etc. and hosting meetings (like this one). He thinks we as a society are reaching a tipping point of awareness, regarding the importance of healthy natural foods.

MREA Brochure and Website: Chris Borton suggested reprinting the brochures

on heavier stock paper. Chris Daum moved that 500 new brochures be printed. Steve Aagenes seconded the motion and it passed unanimously. Chris Borton was asked to take the lead on this project. Kathi Montgomery asked that the website be prominently displayed, and it was also agreed that the new brochure would not have a date of publication printed on it. Dave Ryan mentioned that he has done some work to update the brochure, fact sheets, website, etc.

MREA Bylaws Revision: Patrick Judge walked through the proposed changes to the Bylaws. Several additional changes were suggested by board members and accepted by the group. For example, Chris Borton suggested to change the regular meeting date to the Second Wednesday of each month, and also that there be some mention of the website in the Bylaws. Patrick offered to include it under the duties of the Secretary, to work with the President to monitor the website and ensure that it is updated regularly. Chris Daum has yet to receive any bills from NCAT for the time that they've invested recently toward improving the MREA site. Chris Daum moved that the Bylaw revisions be adopted, Tom Bishop seconded the motion, and the motion passed unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Chris Daum reported \$6604.71 currently in the account, with the following checks yet to be cleared:

- \$250 for the SAVE Foundation Earth Day Event
- \$329.50 for the shirts
- ~\$540 for the Dynamo lights

Chris unveiled the shirts and lights, and they were very well received! There were 30 shirts and 8 tank tops ordered at a per-unit price of \$8.68. They will be sold for \$15 each. The next order will be about \$1 dollar cheaper, because they now have our logo. There were 100 lights ordered at a per-unit price of \$5.40. They will be sold for \$10 each. Several members eagerly purchased shirts, lights, or both. Lu Marie offered to make For Sale signs for the Sustainability Fair. Paul Farley will also be present to help work the booth at the Sustainability Fair. Chris Daum also suggested unloading the remaining Christmas lights at the firesale priced of \$10 each. While this would represent a price below the original cost, the group agreed it would be good to recoup some of the initial investment. It was also pointed out that MREA has already broken even on the Christmas lights. An MREA brochure should be placed in each box.

Chris reported that to-date, 34 businesses or individuals had paid their 2006 dues.

USB Report: John Campbell gave an update on NorthWestern's renewables budget. He reported that the overall funding level was somewhat reduced, due to high demand on the low-income side and other factors. The project budget

is \$650,000 and the education budget is \$60,000. A summary of the breakdown follows (John gave more detailed descriptions of each - also, Pat is on the USB advisory committee and is familiar with the projects if readers have additional questions):

Project Budget (about \$350,000 worth - there will be another round in October):

- Helena High School vocational education house -- \$28,000
- 10 kW Bergey (Alternative Energy Systems) -- \$10,000 (\$2/Watt with cap of \$10,000)
- 2 kW wind machine (also AES) -- \$4000
- Farm in the Dell pole-mount PV - about \$30,000
- Water Environment Technologies 5 kW PV -- \$15,000
- NCAT Energy Star Solar Project (for new construction) -- \$50,000
- Butte Airport 3kW PV -- \$22,000
- Two Firestation PV projects (with battery backup) -- \$45,000
- Billings Community Center 3 kW PV -- \$22,000
- Billings Food Bank (on hold until they move to their new location) -- \$21,000
- Residential Solar PV program:
7 dealers x 2 systems each x 2000 W/system x \$3.50 / W = \$98,000

Projects that appear to have fallen through include the SAGE Resources geothermal project and the Parrot Mine Complex geothermal project (due to skyrocketing steel prices, etc.)

Education Budget (about \$60,000 worth - there will NOT be an additional round):

- Dealers & Installers Mandatory Safety Training in Butte in September -- \$20,000
- www.montanagreenpower.com -- \$15,000
- Sage Mountain Center events / lectures -- \$15,000
- AERO Sustainability Tours -- \$9,400

Other educational activities that were mentioned, but that were apparently funded USB dollars from previous years include:

- Consumers Guide to Small Wind & Solar PV Publication (copies available)
- Saturn Resources Solar Publication (going to print)
- Melissa Anderson Wind / PV Video (see below)
- High Mark Video (directed at students)
- Education Package for every science teacher in the state

John Campbell also discussed some difficulties NorthWestern is encountering with its DSM program. Apparently some municipal and other larger customers are expressing reluctance to implement efficiency improvements - even those that are highly cost-effective (with payback periods as short as 1.5 years, and with potential savings of up to 33% of their electricity usage). John is exploring other financing mechanisms to encourage participation.

Alternative Energy Loan Program Update: Kathi Montgomery reported that the proposed revisions to the administrative rules implementing the loan program were to be published by the Secretary of State soon. The comment period will be open until August 3. The changes in the rules are necessary to implement the changes made by the 2005 legislature (which expanded the program). In response to a question, Kathi thought that about 35% of the loans were for stand-alone, off-grid systems and mentioned that an outcomes-report would be out this summer. In response to another question, Kathi said that interest in the loan program has really picked up, and she feels that the program is strong (and could weather a default situation if it had to - Gateway and DEQ would make serious attempts at collecting any bad debts).

License Plate Update: Kathi Montgomery reported that specialty license plates are available to non-profit groups like MREA at an initial cost of \$4000. The organization then receives approximately \$20 for each plate ordered. Therefore it takes about 200 orders to recoup the investment. It was pointed out that the purpose could be more than just fundraising - that obtaining visibility for MREA is also a valuable goal. Kathi responded that sometimes a generic scene or graphic is preferable to a logo or organization name, because it may have broader appeal. She showed the group the very attractive plate put together for the Corporation for the Northern Rockies. The next step would be to find an artist to do some initial work on a design. Kathi said that the design work has to be done in coordination with the program's graphic designer. Kathi emphasized that colorful, attractive plates tend to sell well. Pat pointed out that no one has yet capitalized on the image of a wind turbine, but that someone probably would soon. Kathi thought that a wind turbine in a field of wheat with a blue sky and sun would be a good image. The caption might be something like ³Sustainable Energy for Montana.² Kathi said she would obtain the application.

Sustainability Fair: This year's event will be held July 8 in Livingston. It sounded like there would be plenty of MREA members present, to help staff the booth. Dave Ryan will be giving a workshop on solar water heaters.

Sustainability Festival: Dave Ryan passed out flyers detailing the NCAT Sustainability Fest, to be held NCAT's Butte facility on Thursday, August 24, from 12:00 - 8:00 pm. The fee for booths is \$70 for for-profit companies and \$35 for non-profit organizations. The contact information is: Shelly Davis, Sheila Knutson, or Holly Hill, NCAT, 3040 Continental Dr., Butte, MT 59701, 406/494-4572 www.SustainableMontana.org

Viewing of the new NorthWestern Energy Distributed Renewable Energy Video: Following a break, the group reconvened to watch this new 16 minute-long educational video focusing on distributed wind and solar PV systems. The group generally enjoyed the video, although it was pointed out that the

video mischaracterizes the net-metering arrangement as ³wholesale² and gives a bleak (and in some members¹ views, misleading) picture of the economics. The video was produced and narrated by Melissa Anderson. John Campbell offered to make the video available.

Other Reports: Chris Borton announced that Sage Mountain Center had recently received an Ecostar Award, and also was chosen as this year's Runner-Up in the Montana Sustainable Business Award category. Way to go Chris and Linda and the rest of the gang!

Next Meeting Date: The next meeting will be held on Wednesday October 11 at 12:30 pm, possibly in Great Falls.

Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 3:28 pm.

These Minutes were prepared by Patrick Judge, Secretary.