

Minutes of the Montana Renewable Energy Association  
Quarterly Meeting, January 12, 2010  
Bozeman Library

**Note: Bold text indicates action items that require follow-up.**

Present: (30, 6 out of 9 board members represented, 5 required for a quorum)

Dave Ryan (NCAT, Butte), President and Board Member  
Christopher Borton (Sage Mountain Center, Whitehall), Vice Pres. and Board Member  
Patrick Judge (NW Energy Coalition, Helena), Secretary and Board Member  
Conor Darby (Independent Power Systems, Bozeman), Board Member  
Tom Bishop (Sunelco, Victor), Board Member  
Roxann Lincoln (Montana DEQ, Helena), with Kathi Montgomery's proxy  
John Palm (Bozeman Green Build / Baker Creek Homes, Bozeman)  
Chuck Magraw (Renewable Northwest Project / NRDC, Helena)  
Deb Poteet (Sustainable Building Systems, Missoula)  
Dan Brandborg (Sustainable Building Systems, Missoula)  
Al Borrego (Del Sol Technologies, Bozeman)  
Todd Hoitsma (Liquid Solar Systems, Bozeman)  
Adrien Tanguay (Liquid Solar Systems, Bozeman)  
John Campbell (NorthWestern Energy, Butte)  
Dan Kenworthy (Kenworthy Electric, Sheridan)  
John Bennett (Enterprise Unlimited, Simms)  
Kim Bennett (Enterprise Unlimited, Simms)  
Candi McDonald (Radiant Engineering, Bozeman)  
Brian Reardon (Radiant Engineering, Bozeman)  
Ben Brouwer (AERO, Helena)  
Steve Poore (Northern Plains Wind Energy, Billings)  
Carolyn M. Villa (Northern Plains Wind Energy, Billings)  
David Villa (Northern Plains Wind Energy, Billings)  
Ben Reed (Winpower West, Billings)  
Orion Thornton (Independent Power Systems, Bozeman)  
Sara Biddle (Independent Power Systems, Bozeman)  
Barton Churchill (Independent Power Systems, Bozeman)  
Dwight Rose (Valley View Electric, Helena)  
Theresa Huyser (Green Light Solutions, Gallatin Gateway)  
Jenni Bryce (Pine Ridge Products, Belt)

**“State of the State” Technology Report:** The discussion began at 12:09 with updates from Ben Reed on the Iskra wind turbine in Big Timber. Conor Darby chimed in with his views on the ARE machines, which he generally likes. Next, Dan Kenworthy, Tom Bishop, and Conor Darby discussed some of the challenges associated with solar trackers (synchronization, etc.), and how to troubleshoot them.

**Call to Order:** The official meeting was called to order by President Ryan at 12:35 pm. He led a round of more-thorough-than-usual introductions, aided by nametags supplied by Tom Bishop. Dave expressed his enthusiasm over the association's growing membership, and its diverse mix

of policy people and technical people.

**Approval of Minutes:** Patrick Judge moved that the minutes of the October 13, 2009 meeting be approved. Conor Darby seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously.

**Treasurer's Report:** Patrick Judge delivered the financial report for Chris Daum, who could not attend. MREA has \$11,701.55 in its checking account, and 22 members who have paid their dues for 2010 (in addition to numerous other members who are still in good standing due to their payment of 2009 dues).

**Board Election Results:** Patrick Judge reported that the board election was quite close -- "it wasn't until the last few ballots came in that there started being some separation, breaking up some of the ties. We had a record 29 voters participating, with all of the 19 candidates receiving multiple votes." He announced that in the end, the following nine members had been elected for the coming two-year term:

Ben Brouwer  
Tom Bishop  
Christopher Borton  
Conor Darby  
Chris Daum  
Henry Dykema  
Patrick Judge  
Kathi Montgomery  
Dave Ryan

**Officer Elections, for the offices of President, Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer:**

Dave Ryan announced that after ten years at the helm, he thought it might be a good time for someone else to step up. Conor Darby emerged as a potential candidate, but expressed some trepidation in trying to fill Dave's very large shoes. The other officers announced that they would be willing to continue in their posts, and no other board members expressed interest in those positions. Ben Brouwer moved the following slate:

Conor Darby, President  
Christopher Borton, Vice President  
Patrick Judge, Secretary  
Chris Daum, Treasurer

Tom Bishop seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. The group congratulated the new board members and officers, and thanked the outgoing members for their service. **It was suggested that the bylaws be amended to require outgoing officers to help mentor their replacements.** The presidential powers were ceremoniously passed to Conor Darby, who chaired the remainder of the meeting.

**Alternative Energy Revolving Loan Program Report:** Roxann Lincoln reported that the Fiscal Year 2010 funds (\$1.3 million) had gone out at a record pace, in just six-months' time. These funds helped support the full gamut of alternative energy projects: solar, wind, ground-source heat pumps, and some low-emission biomass projects. The geographic distribution of

funds was also good -- word is clearly getting out, even to remote places such as Scobey, MT. Roxann also announced the availability of \$1.2 million in stimulus funds that can be used for larger projects (up to \$100,000). Use of these funds requires posting of the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act sign, and no funds have made it out the door yet under this program. For Fiscal Year 2010, the interest rate on the AER loans was 3.5%. In FY 2011, it may increase to 4%. There was some discussion over whether use of these federally-subsidized loans would disqualify a project for the 30% federal tax credit.

DEQ won't know the exact amount of next year's funds until June, but likely, the amount will be smaller (meaning that many applications may not be funded). And even though this is a revolving fund, not a lot of those funds are circling back in yet (just because the program is still relatively new). Loan repayments have been good -- only a small number of defaults occurred this year, despite the bad economy. There is also a renewable demonstration grant program in Montana (with \$1 million in total funds) that is to be allocated to energy storage or integration type technologies.

**Safety Committee Report:** Conor Darby reported that the recent Bill Brooks presentation was a hit, and covered more than just safety -- quality control, best practices, etc. **Conor hopes that a second, more in-depth 3-day presentation can be scheduled.** There have also been some OSHA changes -- new material for fall protection, etc.

John Campbell announced that in 2010, there will be 8 classes. These safety trainings are a work-in-progress that are getting better all the time. Campbell welcomes comments on how to strengthen the program. **Tom Bishop suggested that certificates should be given upon completion of each class, and Campbell agreed.**

There was discussion amongst the MREA members about how necessary these trainings really are for people who have had other trainings and many years of experience. Some members feel these requirements are overly burdensome and redundant. John Campbell noted that the NWE requirements are only for those installers wanting to receive NWE USB funds. Ben Reed, Tom Bishop, Conor Darby, and others testified to the importance of continual safety training that addresses the unique risks in the industry: electric hazard, lockout-tagout, fall protection, crane operation, etc. They also noted that the trainings not only help to address NWE's liability concerns, but also help to establish and document the industry's commitment to safety. Mike Foreman of OSHA, for example, remains very supportive of the partnership with MREA. Dave Ryan observed that this is all new stuff that is just being developed -- 'if you think something needs changing, just get involved and speak up.' It was noted that NWE's policy had already been redrafted to incorporate suggestions made by MREA members. Chuck Magraw commented that the industry is experiencing some growing pains, and will unavoidably be carefully scrutinized -- any problems will be exposed -- "what any one of you in the industry does, affects you all." Dave Ryan agreed that MREA needs to be very vigilant about these issues. John Campbell said that if an accident did occur, it could close out the industry to anyone other than electricians -- 'at a minimum, if something happens, it could send your workman's compensation rates through the ceiling.'

**USB Report:** John Campbell agreed that having Bill Brooks back for three days would be terrific. In addition, he would like to host a two-day presentation by a wind specialist. He

noted that Bill Brooks spent a second day in town, meeting with electricians, and that that portion had also gone over very well.

Campbell reported that NorthWestern's USB renewable energy funding was in the \$750,000 - \$900,000 range for 2009 (final USB report comes out in March). The solar rebate incentive is \$3 per watt up to a maximum of \$6000 for a residential project. He stressed the importance of getting the work done in the specified timeframe, due to legal requirements. He said the money is allocated roughly 50% to the private sector, and 50% to non-profits and governmental facilities (state, local, and occasionally federal). He was worried about the Red Lodge water treatment project (which was why Henry Dykema was unable to attend today's meeting). On the education front, NWE developed a new and shorter guide to take the place of "Bright Ideas," which has now been retired. NWE will also soon be releasing a new guide on the funding of renewable energy projects.

For 2010, he predicted that the USB funds would be comparable to those from 2009, but that there would be more parties competing. There are currently about 10 certified installers for solar, and the same number for wind. Brian Reardon expressed his gratitude for NWE's conservation programs, and Todd Hoitsma thought it amazing that not all of the insulation installers in the state had yet memorized the details of the valuable financing tools that are now available. The discussion turned briefly to net-metering related policy issues (see addendum).

**Hiring a Staff Person:** It was noted that MREA had reached its goal of \$10,000, which was the threshold the board had identified for hiring a part-time Executive Director (either as an employee or as an independent contractor), to help bring MREA to the next level of effectiveness. Initially, the position would be focused on developing and implementing a fundraising strategy to sustain that position going forward. Ben Reed suggested the creation of a committee to finalize the position announcement and to recruit a qualified applicant. Patrick Judge moved that a Hiring Committee be created consisting of Dave Ryan (chair), Ben Reed, John Palm, Roxann Lincoln, and Matt Elsaesser. Christopher Borton seconded the motion, and it passed unanimously. **Patrick Judge offered to assist the committee with its initial set-up (by supplying contact information, etc.). Judge also agreed to investigate the status of MREA's other committees, particularly the Policy Committee, so that these could potentially be reinvigorated.**

**Broad Discussion of MREA's Mission & Vision in 2010:** Dave Ryan asked the group the following questions (in preparation for his upcoming presentation to the Harvesting Clean Energy conference):

- 1) Is renewable energy policy moving forward in Montana?
- 2) What is the state of the renewable energy industry in Montana -- is it growing or not, and why?

Tom Bishop responded that yes, the industry is definitely growing. His business has shifted from predominantly out-of-state to in-state. Christopher Borton agreed, commenting that the recent push on energy efficiency has helped people think about BOTH aspects of sustainable energy. But Ben Reed said that a lot of people are still unaware, and there a lot of misinformation continues to circulate. He feels **MREA should be the face of the renewable energy industry in Montana**, and that **education dollars are well spent -- 'we should be a lot stronger & a lot better organized -- it's unfortunate that schools are constructing energy curricula without consulting us.'** Tom Bishop noted that the goal of the Missoula College of

Technology energy program was to motivate students, inspire them to focus on some aspect of it, and to go on from there (which will almost assuredly require additional training). Ben Reed and Theresa Huyser felt that had some use, but that people were more interested in landing a job upon graduating from school (especially in this economy). They felt that COT has perhaps failed to adequately convey the real prospects of converting that degree directly into employment. Wind turbines technician jobs, for example, require more training. The group was in agreement that many of the new jobs that are being created in this economy are coming from the clean energy industry.

**Conor Darby felt the group could do a better job attending expos, educating the public and marketing the organization to new potential members. Theresa Huyser felt that MREA-led trainings could be a source of income for the organization, and could be much stronger (and more affordable) than the alternatives currently available -- 'and why not keep the money in Montana?' she asked. John Palm cited Dale Horton's HERS (Home Energy Rating System) training as a good example of the kind of thing that could be done. Ben Reed said that the organization has a duty to educate both the public at large and the people coming into the industry -- 'let's be the standard setter, and have a role at the colleges and universities.' There was also discussion about offering summer internships and apprentice programs (Ben mentioned that he had some contacts at the State who might be able to help). Roxann Lincoln suggested organizing an annual conference, with workshops, etc.**

Chuck Magraw said there's certainly evidence that interest is growing, but Montana is also a bit stuck when compared to other states (this is demonstrable, in terms of legislative and regulatory policy, number of installs, etc.). He said there's always the possibility that federal climate and energy legislation will usher in a whole new paradigm, but until then, Montana could be far more proactive / progressive -- 'our utilities and policy leaders haven't fully embraced those opportunities.' He said he was curious about the connection between MREA and big wind. He noted that 210 MW came online in Montana last year, and that 300+ additional megawatts would be coming online soon. The Montana Alberta Tie Line is receiving stimulus dollars, and generally speaking, these new megawatts are destined for out-of-state. **The niche that MREA could market for itself is "Montana Renewables for and by Montanans."** He worries that "big wind" is becoming the only face of renewable energy in Montana.

Conor Darby contrasted the situation in Montana with the amazing work being done in Colorado. Amendment 37 led to Excel's program, which offers a \$4 per watt rebate and which has spurred more than 100 new companies to set-up shop since 2005. Under CA-37, there is a specific consumer-owned generation carve-out in the Renewable Portfolio Standard. Conor also pointed to the terrific work of the Colorado Solar Energy Industries Association ([www.coseia.org](http://www.coseia.org)), and mentioned that 30,000 people now attend the Solar Power International conference. Chuck said that Montana's status as a comparatively poor and sparsely populated state does not explain or excuse how far it is dropping behind in the rankings. Examples from Nebraska and Arizona were given. Finally, the group noted the tremendous growth in the "third-party ownership" model for solar projects -- 'SolarCity is now like the Walmart of solar companies.'

**Announcements:** Christopher Borton announced that Sage Mountain Center would be offering a basic PV course for independent electrical contractors. **Ben Brouwer recommended that MREA go through a formal strategic planning process (with a facilitator), to help develop a work plan for a new staffer, and to address other, big picture issues. Ben Reed argued in favor of strong standing committees for the organization -- each one chaired by a board**

**member and tasked with reporting back to the members each quarterly meeting. John Palm noted that it will be important for the organization to figure out its niche, and how it overlaps and integrates with groups like AERO.**

**Next Meeting:** The next regularly scheduled quarterly meeting of MREA will take place in Great Falls on April 14th.

**Adjournment:** President Darby adjourned the meeting at 4:18 pm.

**Addenda Item 1:** On January 14, 2010, the following board members voted in favor of signing on to a letter to the Energy and Telecommunications Interim Committee of the Legislature, regarding Feed-In Tariffs and Net-Metering:

Tom Bishop

Ben Brouwer

Conor Darby

Henry Dykema

Patrick Judge

Kathi Montgomery

Dave Ryan

(No "Nay" votes were expressed.)

The comments are posted here:

[http://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2009\\_2010/Energy\\_Telecommunications/Meeting\\_Documents/January10/AERO-response.pdf](http://leg.mt.gov/content/Committees/Interim/2009_2010/Energy_Telecommunications/Meeting_Documents/January10/AERO-response.pdf)

**Addenda Item 2:** On February 2, 2010, Dan Brandborg requested use of the MREA trailer for two trade shows in Missoula. The board approved this request, with the support from the following five members and with the caveat that **the board needs to develop a policy for trailer usage (specifying requirements for training, insurance, MREA publicity, etc.):**

Dave Ryan

Conor Darby

Chris Daum

Henry Dykema

Tom Bishop

**Addenda Item 3:** News item -- on February 5, 2010, the Small Wind Certification Council contacted Kathi Montgomery and announced that it is "open for business":  
<http://www.smallwindcertification.org/>

**Addenda Item 4:** On March 8, 2010, Conor Darby, Dave Ryan, and Kathi Montgomery met with Rees Haynes and Chris Knight (from Vancouver, British Columbia) on the topic of IBEW electricians interested in getting involved in solar PV. Mr. Haynes and Mr. Knight work to assist electricians interested in doing that. Conor, Dave, and Kathi gave them the lay of the land regarding some of the Montana-specific issues.

**Addenda Item 5:** On March 31, 2010, Conor Darby delivered testimony to the Montana Public Service Commission regarding its rulemaking on integration standards for distributed generation.

The testimony that Darby delivered was developed / endorsed by the following MREA board members:

Christopher Borton

Ben Brouwer (lead drafter)

Conor Darby

Chris Daum

Henry Dykema

Patrick Judge

**Addenda Item 6:** As of April 8, the following MREA board members had agreed on a specific approach for hiring an Executive Director, the details of which still need to be discussed further with the full Hiring Committee:

Tom Bishop

Christopher Borton

Ben Brouwer

Conor Darby

Chris Daum

Patrick Judge

Kathi Montgomery

Dave Ryan

These Minutes were prepared by Patrick Judge, Secretary.