

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE WEDNESDAY, MARCH 3, 2010

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Think Wind Power, Think ‘Iowa’ Iowa Ranks Among World Leaders, Can Do More

IOWA CITY, Iowa (March 3, 2010) — Iowa has tremendous opportunity to expand on its emergence as a world leader in wind-energy production, researchers said today.

Up to 20 percent of Iowa electricity is produced from wind, bringing Iowa to a benchmark world leader Denmark reached in recent years. In addition, Iowa ranks second only to Texas in the United States on wind-power capacity, but is far ahead of Texas on a per-capita basis, according to a new report released today by the nonpartisan Iowa Policy Project (IPP).

“Americans need not fear taking strong steps to address climate change — new estimates of Iowa wind production and production potential show this. Coupling that with the demonstrated opportunities of energy efficiency, Iowa is showing the way and should continue to grow as a leader,” said IPP Research Associate Teresa Galluzzo, co-author of the report.

In their report, “Think Wind Power, Think ‘Iowa,’” Galluzzo and IPP Executive Director David Osterberg note calculations from the Iowa Utilities Board (IUB) that estimate 17 percent to 20 percent of all electricity generated in Iowa comes from wind, with 3,670 megawatts of installed wind capacity; a 33.3 percent average wind capacity factor; and approximately 53 million megawatt hours of total electricity generation in 2008.

“In the last two years, Iowa added 2,500 megawatts of wind turbine capacity, and now has wind capacity nearly six times the size of Iowa’s lone nuclear plant,” Osterberg said. “Our total wind-powered generation is enough to serve the electric needs of 940,000 residences — nearly 75 percent of Iowa homes.”

The report notes the difference between electric capacity and actual electricity production.

“Since a wind power plant cannot produce electricity when the wind does not blow, the capacity of wind turbines is large in relation to production. Iowa has about 7,500 megawatts of coal-powered electric plants, which produced about 75 percent of the state’s electricity in 2007. In contrast, 3,670 megawatts of wind turbines are necessary to produce 17 to 20 percent of Iowa’s electricity,” the report stated.

The researchers said it is important to recognize the economic impact of wind energy, as wind-turbine-related companies create jobs in the state.

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“When you realize that Iowa lost nearly 20,000 manufacturing jobs last year, you can see what an opportunity this industry offers,” Osterberg said. “Plus, we cannot miss the connection to our environment and climate change.

“Claims that these sustainable, clean options are too costly just don’t hold up. While Iowa has undergone this rapid expansion of wind power, our average electricity prices have stayed below the national average.”

The report also noted the MidAmerican Energy, the nation’s leading owner of wind-powered electric generation among rate-regulated utilities, has more than 1,393 megawatts of wind facilities in operation or planned in Iowa, receiving approval from IUB in December to build an additional 1,001 megawatts of wind power in Iowa.

“Thus, even as Iowa is leading the way in harnessing wind energy, there is significant room to increase our use of the wind’s renewable power and reduce our greenhouse gas emissions,” Galluzzo stated.

The researchers also noted the importance of continuing efforts toward energy efficiency, where the state also has been a leader.

The Iowa Policy Project (IPP) is a nonpartisan, nonprofit research and policy analysis organization based in Mount Vernon, with its principal office in Iowa City. IPP reports on job trends and other public policy issues facing Iowa are at <http://www.iowapolicyproject.org>.

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