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Tribal Entrepreneurs Learn Ways to Play in Deregulation Game

Bonneville Power Administration
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SPOKANE, Wash. - Close to 100 Tribal members and utility representatives from across the Northwest today kicked off a two-day conference to discuss ways to take advantage of economic opportunities sweeping the country as the federal government deregulates the electric utility industry. The conference is the first of its kind in the Northwest.

No longer content seeing other business interests position themselves to take advantage of the shakedown of the last great American regulated industry, Northwest Tribal leaders have come together to explore how energy deregulation can encourage Tribal business development and job creation as a means to protect Tribal sovereignty.

"Energy deregulation can be an economic development opportunity for Northwest Tribes," said Dave Tovey, president of the Economic Development Corp. of the Affiliated Tribes of the Northwest Indians. "This conference will help Tribal leaders determine how deregulation can best benefit their communities. The Bonneville Power Administration has done a great job of bringing this diverse group of sponsors together to evaluate this important issue."

The two-day conference, which ends on Thursday, is designed to provide forums for Tribal members and industry professionals to discuss a wide array of topics related to changes in the utility industry and how Tribal organizations can seize the opportunities those changes bring. Today, participants discussed regional trends and issues surfacing as deregulation unfolds, how those trends and issues affect the Tribes and what business opportunities Tribes may want to take advantage of. They also reviewed case studies of Tribal business successes from across the country.

A large number of organizations, including the Bonneville Power Administration, Washington Water Power, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, Mission Valley Power, Seattle-Northwest Securities Commission, Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians and the Northwest Power Planning Council sponsored the conference.

"This is the perfect time for Native Americans to join the deregulation fray," said Jack Robertson, BPA's deputy administrator and a conference speaker. "This conference will paint in broad strokes a picture of what's in store for those entrepreneurial-minded members of Tribal organizations interested in being players in the industry. In two days, we can only scratch the surface of what they will eventually have to know. But what they learn today and tomorrow will give them a sound foundation and a good start."

"Through Tribal sovereignty and existing human & natural Tribal resources there will be many choices and opportunities to capitalize on," said Les Bryan, president and chief operating officer for Washington Water Power. "We look forward to sharing information and exploring ideas with the tribes attending this important conference."

Tomorrow's agenda features workshops where participants can discuss with and learn from the experiences of those who have already succeeded. The workshops will be facilitated by the Council of Energy Resources Tribes, an association of 53 Tribes with significant energy resources. Participants will discuss how to develop cogeneration or hydroelectric facilities; how to use financial strategies that suit Tribal projects; and how to establish a Tribal utility.

