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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:
THURSDAY, April 26, 2001
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Astonishing number of wind generation proposals blows into BPA

PORTLAND, Ore. – “The response blew us away,” said George Darr, Bonneville Power Administration’s renewable power resource program manager. Darr spent last weekend counting up the wind generation projects submitted in response to the agency’s request for proposals.

“I thought developers would be far enough along with their projects to submit maybe 1,000 megawatts of projects, but the 25 proposals added up to about 2,600 megawatts,” said Darr. “Further, if you count the room for expansion included in the proposals, there are over 4,000 megawatts of wind power on these sites. That is astonishing.”

Most of the proposed sites are in Oregon (10) and Washington (8). The rest are distributed among Idaho, Montana, Wyoming and even Canada.

Rep. Norm Dicks (D-Wash.) was also impressed with the response. “I have been convinced that the Pacific Northwest offers the potential for significant wind power generation that could be an effective complement to our hydroelectric system. It is extremely encouraging to see such a large number of creative proposals submitted, and it is my hope that BPA will evaluate them promptly and take advantage of the relatively fast siting capability offered by wind generated power,” said Dicks.

BPA will evaluate the projects in terms of cost, how well they can be integrated into the Northwest power grid and other factors. Location is an important consideration both for how well the projects can be used to serve loads and for the impact they have because of the intermittent nature of wind output. It is very helpful if they are near other generation.

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BPA will select the most promising proposals by the end of May and then begin contract negotiations with developers. Once BPA and the developers have reached agreement on contract terms, BPA will conduct National Environmental Policy Act review of the environmental impact of the proposed projects. Darr hopes the first of the projects can be online in late 2002 or early 2003.

Rep. Greg Walden (R-Ore.), co-chair of the House Renewable Energy Caucus and the sole Northwest member of the Energy and Commerce Committee, was encouraged by the response from rural communities. “We need more energy generation in the Northwest to help us bring down costs. This is one of the best kinds of energy to bring on line — it’s clean and renewable. And the growth of clean energy production in the rural Northwest will bring vital new revenues and jobs to parts of the region that need an economic boost.”

Peter West, green program director at the Renewable Northwest Project in Portland, Ore., was encouraged by the response. “The results show the strength and diversity of the wind resource in the Northwest. With the leadership of BPA, the Northwest is poised to be one of the hottest wind sites in the world. This shows how renewable resources will help solve our energy crisis.”

Because wind speed varies, the 2,600 megawatt capacity of the proposals will likely translate into about 850 average megawatts of power. That is more than enough power to meet the needs of the city of Portland.

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