

GREEN POWER

Check with your electric cooperative to see whether a renewable 'green' option is available to you

by Roy Nollkamper

In the 2005 legislative session, Montana lawmakers passed a bill that required large electric utilities to purchase power from renewable sources. The law specifies 5 percent of the utility's portfolio be from renewable sources like wind and solar energy by 2008, ramping up to 15 percent by 2015.

Electric co-ops of 5,000 meters or more must consider developing a renewable standard that parallels this, while taking into account the effect of the standard on rates, reliability and financial resources. Co-ops with fewer than 5,000 meters are exempt.

Nearly all cooperatives of the Montana Electric Cooperatives' Association offer some kind of green power to members or include a percentage of green power in their portfolios.

Although electric co-ops retain local control or are exempt, the attitude is clear: legislators and many Montanans want to have access to energy produced by renewable energy sources.

Renewable energy comes from resources that naturally replenish, utilize residual materials or recycle waste. Examples are things like hydro (water) generation, landfill methane, coal bed methane, geothermal generation, manure digesters, wind, solar, biomass, and wood just to name the more common

sources of fuel.

Prudent use of renewable and environmentally-favorable resources can strengthen economies around Montana and much of rural America, create value for cooperative members and help put the nation on a course toward a sustainable energy strategy.

Again, while cooperatives in Montana are not mandated to participate in the renewable energy policy, nearly every MECA co-op offer the option to its members. In fact, many already have "Green Tag" and similar programs available.

Green Tags are created when wind power or other renewable energy is substituted for traditional power. The result is a shift away from our dependence on burning fossil fuel to produce electricity. Using clean renewable energy is friendly to the environment and reduces emissions of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases.

Green Tags represent the actual savings in carbon dioxide and other pollutants that occur when green power replaces burning fossil fuel.

Renewable energy is still a little more expensive than buying traditional power, so Green Tags can be purchased in addition to the electricity that you are now using.

Buying Green Tags has the same effect as buying green power. Both replace fossil fuel generators with clean renewables, and both have exactly the same environ-

mental benefits.

Now, before you panic, we at Glacier Electric and other cooperatives don't plan to add charges to your bill out of the blue for green power.

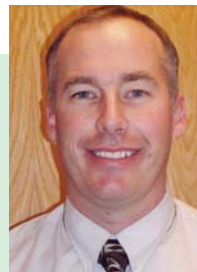
Such programs are voluntary. If you choose to participate, when the tags are available, the cost will be very minimal. In fact, the total increase to a typical electric bill of 1000 kWh would be less than \$5.

Trustees at Marias River Electric, Glacier Electric and Mid-Yellowstone are just three of the cooperatives announcing such programs this month. Boards determine policies and offer green power as an option to members at those cooperatives.

If you're wondering whether your co-op offers green power, just call and ask about such programs.



Roy Nollkamper is the manager of member services at Glacier Electric based in Cut Bank. This piece, edited for statewide use, appeared in the GEC newsletter pages.



Mark Grotbo

“Even though Marias River Electric is exempt from the mandate to purchase renewable energy, we believe meeting the intent of the law without substantial cost increases is a win-win for all involved.”

Mark Grotbo, manager, MRE