

GE Wind Turbines Power Idaho, Belgian Utility Projects

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Perwez, Belgium and Hagerman, Idaho -- The state of Idaho and the small country of Belgium share something in common this month: Two new utility-scale wind farms are now up and running in both locations using GE Energy's 1.5 MW turbines.

In Idaho, the Fossil Gulch Wind Park is the first utility-scale wind project in the state. Currently being developed by the Exergy Development Group of Helena, Montana, the 10.5 MW project's seven wind turbines will be installed on a 416-acre farmland site near Hagerman, Idaho, between Twin Falls and Boise.

Under a 20-year agreement approved by the Idaho Public Utilities Commission, Idaho Power of Boise will purchase the power generated by the Fossil Gulch Wind Park. The utility's Green Power Program provides customers the opportunity to voluntarily contribute toward the purchase of energy from wind and solar resources. Since the program began in 2001, more than 1,800 customers have enrolled, signaling a growing interest in renewable energy throughout the state.

When completed, Fossil Gulch will be Idaho's largest wind project. According to the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA), currently the state's largest wind project is a two-turbine installation with a capacity of only 216 kW. Current development plans for the state, however, include proposed projects ranging in size from 170 to 200 MW.

Moving all the way across the world to country considerably smaller than the entire state of Idaho, Belgium just inaugurated their newest wind project located near the city of Perwez in the Walloon region, about 50 kilometers southeast of Brussels. Five new 1.5 MW turbines will add 7.5 MW of wind-generated electricity to the Belgian grid. Estimated annual generation of the five new wind turbines is approximately 16.8 million kilowatt-hours, or enough power for more than 3,500 households.

The Perwez project is being developed by Air Energy s.a., a company specializing in the development and operation of power plants based on renewable energy, primarily wind power. The construction and operation of the wind farm will be handled by Les Vents de Perwez, s.a., a joint venture between Air Energy and Electrabel, the largest power company in Belgium.

The Perwez project and other new renewable energy development is being encouraged by a "green certificate" program introduced by the Belgian national and the Flemish and Wallonian regional governments in 2002.

The country's installed wind capacity at the end of 2004 was 95 MW, but that total is expected to grow to 668 MW by the end of 2008, according to projections by the Danish consulting firm BTM Consult. One of the first wind turbines in Belgium's Walloon region was a 600 kW machine installed at Perwez in 2000.

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