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Maine alternative energy leaders hit Europe on trade mission

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By Jackie Noblett

Maine Gov. John Baldacci and a group of clean energy business officials are heading to Europe next month to showcase the state's wind and ocean energy capabilities to the world's leading renewable energy developers.

The six-day trip has developers, construction company executives, consultants, manufacturers and other clean tech industry leaders travelling to Germany and Spain, two countries known as leaders in the finance, development and manufacturing aspects of various alternative energies, including wind power. Members of the Maine delegation say the trip is meant to showcase the state as an attractive place for foreign investment, as well as for local developers to make key contacts with their European suppliers and bankers.

"Of course the Europeans are way out at the forefront of wind development, so this is our chance for our company and Maine to show what we can do," said Jackson Parker, president and CEO of Woolwich, Maine-based construction company Reed & Reed Inc.

Sponsored by the Maine International Trade Center, the trade mission provides match-making services to companies looking to meet specific business prospects as well as a chance to attend Europe's largest wind technology trade show in Zaragoza, Spain.

"We've worked hard in Maine to set an aggressive path for renewable energy investment and development," Baldacci said in an e-mailed statement. "This trade mission is an important next step. We have many innovative people who are excited about the potential to pursue opportunities in the renewable energy sector. The trade mission will enable these innovators to make crucial connections with those at the forefront of renewable energy projects in Europe."

This will not be the first trade mission to Germany for the governor; he visited that country and Italy in November of 2004. Yet this trip's focus on clean energy in particular indicates how important it and Spain are to the state's desire to maximize its green power potential.

Maine has lofty goals for wind farm development — some 2,000 megawatts installed by 2015 and 3,000 megawatts by 2020 — and developing projects offshore will likely be

necessary to achieve that goal. A 2007 task force on wind power development suggested that some 10 percent of the state's 2020 goal could come from offshore resources, yet Germany is one of the few places that has successfully brought offshore wind power online and industry experts expect European developers to find attractive projects in Maine.

One foreign wind developer is already active in New England. Iberdrola SA, based in Bilbao, Spain, owns a 24 megawatt wind farm in Lempster, N.H., powered by turbines made by Madrid's Gamesa Technology Corp. Iberdrola also became a major power provider in Connecticut and Maine after it acquired utility Energy East in September of 2008.

Europe is also proving to be a key source of financing for wind projects in the aftermath of last fall's collapse of major wind backer Lehman Brothers. Last month, German investment bank HSH Nordbank AG provided a \$76 million loan to Newton wind developer First Wind Holdings Inc. to expand its Stetson Wind project in Danforth, Maine.

In the end, Maine businesses are looking for not only development interest but also industrial beachheads and the jobs that come with it.

"I think that's certainly part of it," said Angus King, former governor of Maine and principal of wind developer Independence Wind LLC. "Many of the foreign manufacturers of turbines and other components are looking for sites in the U.S., and given the high wind resources in Maine and the Maritimes, we're hoping the geography, the work force and the investments brings some of that work here."