

Trip demonstrating value of cooperation

Maine leaders see benefit of touting state's end-to-end chain of companies working on wind.

*By Matt Wickenheiser, Staff Writer
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BREMEN, Germany — When Reed & Reed officials go into meetings with Spanish and German companies during this gubernatorial trade mission, they don't go in alone.

A subcontractor, Patrick Graham of James W. Sewall Co., can talk about permitting and engineering. Stephen Perry of Sargent Corp., another subcontractor, can address access issues – how to get roads to remote sites where wind turbines will go.

Reed & Reed of Woolwich is a general contractor and a big player in wind farm construction, building 200 turbines in New England.

When it was invited on Maine's trade mission, Reed & Reed asked its subcontractors along, said John Cooney, vice president of finance and development.

The company wants to show investment bankers, potential wind farm developers, that Reed & Reed – and by extension, Maine – provides a "one-stop shop," he said.

With its focus on wind power, this is one of the most targeted trade missions Maine has sponsored. Instead of businesses from a range of sectors, most participants are construction-related companies. And a level of congeniality and purpose has been evident.

"Maine is a close-knit community. We know one another, we like to play well in the same sandbox," said Perry. "We can go out one night and have drinks, and bid against each other the next day."

Sometimes competitors become collaborators. For instance, Sullivan & Merritt Constructors of Hermon and Reed & Reed have talked about working together in the future.

"The common goal is, we all want to bring business to Maine," said Perry.

Wind power is much more advanced in Europe than in the United States – particularly in the east. While there is opposition to wind power in the U.S., more and more projects are popping up in Maine and the rest of New England.

"It's going to continue to advance and evolve, and we're at the front end of the evolution," said Cooney of Reed & Reed. "We're all poised to participate and reap the benefits of the industry as it continues to mature."

Paul Davis, project manager for the Maine Composites Alliance, said the companies participating in the trip are competitive by nature, with their own agendas. While here, however, they are providing a unified picture of the opportunity to develop wind power in Maine.

And they're looking to increase coordination.

That has not always been the case.

For example, when representatives of a half-dozen Maine companies and organizations, including the University of Maine, attended a wind power conference in Chicago earlier this year, there was no real coordinated message, or unified attempt to tout Maine's end-to-end chain of companies working on wind.

Other states with cohesive efforts were ahead of the game, said Davis. In discussions about wind efforts, Maine wasn't even on the map.

That's not going to be the case at the next U.S. conference, in Dallas in 2010, said Davis.

After a day of meetings at a trade show in Zaragoza, Spain, Davis and other trade mission delegates met briefly in a train station.

They talked about the Dallas show, and how they could band together to occupy a bigger space, with more activity.

A recently formed trade group, the Maine Wind Industry Initiative, is seeking to organize the industry and identify companies up and down the wind power chain, from electrical contractors to rigging and transport firms, blasting companies to civil engineers, Davis said.

They'll look at ways to ensure that Maine isn't just a "doorstep" for wind developers – meaning they'll hire Maine companies to do work in the state, and hopefully elsewhere.

And the group will provide a "unified front to the world marketplace," said Davis.

"This trip, in particular, is bringing a whole lot of us closer together," he said.

Today, the delegation is touring wind power installations in Bremerhaven, and will meet with REpower, a leading manufacturer of onshore and offshore turbines. REpower is part of a group that was just awarded a \$2 billion wind farm project in Quebec.

Davis said the Bremerhaven area has a reputation for being what Maine wants to project: a place that has every company and expertise needed to design, locate, build and maintain wind farms.

"There's a great supply base here. It's going to help us set the vision for Maine," he said. "There's nothing like seeing how something works."

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