

Wind power giant shows interest in state

Maine officials pitch the state's turbine siting potential to Iberdrola, a Spanish company that owns CMP.

By Matt Wickenheiser, Staff Writer
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Gov. John Baldacci gets a briefing on Iberdrola's wind power operations center Monday. Operators can look at real-time maps and schematics, pull up pictures and view data on the company's wind turbines around the world.

TOLEDO, Spain — Through its sophisticated operations center here, the Iberdrola power company can instantly check on any of its 5,500 wind turbines in 10 countries, using giant electronic maps showing the locations and data from the machinery such as wind speed and temperature readings.

By pushing a few buttons, operators can see whatever they need to make their global system more efficient as it turns wind into electricity, from blown-out schematics of each turbine to real-time photographs.

What Maine officials would like to see is a few of those wind turbines in their state.

On the first official day of a trade mission focused on renewable energy, Gov. John Baldacci and about 10 business people from Maine visited Iberdrola, the parent company of Energy East. Energy East, in turn, is the parent of Central Maine Power Co., which has 600,000 customers in the state and employs more than 1,200 people.

The week-long trip will include a visit today to the WindPower Expo in Zaragoza, Spain, a tour of the turbine manufacturer REpower in Bremerhaven, Germany, on Thursday, and meetings Friday with officials from StatOilHydro in Stavanger, Norway, which is creating what it describes as the world's first full-scale floating wind turbine.



"(Wind power) is the one area I get to see daylight, real opportunity," Baldacci said.

Peter Cianchette of Cianbro Corp., left, meets Monday with Alberto Sicre, head of engineering at Iberdrola, and Amparo Moraleda, chief operating officer of Iberdrola International. Iberdrola bills itself as "the world leader in renewable energy."

Iberdrola's operations center is in Toledo, a romantic Old World city with a skyline dominated by the Toledo Cathedral.

Located in a very dry area of Spain, the city has an overall patina of soft tan colors. It's the land of Cervantes' Don Quixote, and even if the windmills are long gone, the company that has harnessed wind around the world is very much here.

Iberdrola has wind farms in Connecticut, Texas and on the West Coast. As Maine aggressively pursues wind projects for both the interior of the state and the embryonic offshore market, having Iberdrola, the "world leader in renewable energy," set up a project in the state would "back up Maine on the world stage," Baldacci said.

Maine is working to identify as many as five sites to test offshore wind turbine platforms, said Baldacci, who would like to see Iberdrola take an interest in setting up test technology on one of those sites, or possibly pursue a wind farm in the state's interior.

During a presentation to the group from Maine, Carlos Gasco, head of prospective for the company, said Iberdrola would be "happy to seriously explore business opportunities in your state."

Spain's use of wind is a success story, said Gasco. Eleven percent of the country's electricity is generated by wind. A main reason is that the regulatory system is set up to provide stability and predictability for businesses, keys to any sector that is looking for investment.

In particular, he noted the cap-and-floor price setup.

Basically, wind-power companies will always get a certain base amount for their power, but they won't make more than a set amount should the market price skyrocket.

So they never make abnormally huge profits, but also never take a bath.

The company is involved in research and development in the power-producing areas of offshore wind, marine tidal and solar, he said.

During a lunch after the presentations, the business part of the visit became evident, as Baldacci noted that Maine is well-positioned for wind-power investment.

CMP already has an investment plan before Maine's Public Utilities Commission, calling for spending more than \$1 billion to upgrade its system and improve future reliability.

If approved by the PUC and ISO New England – where the funding would come from – the project would produce 2,000 jobs for four years.

Maine has plenty of wind, a permitting process that's designed to expedite wind projects, and a key testing facility at the University of Maine. Federal stimulus funds aimed at renewable energy take much of the risk out of the investment, Baldacci said.

The state also has companies that are skilled in building components for wind farms and have experience in setting up the turbines, said Janine Bisailon-Cary, director of the Maine International Trade Center, which organized the trade mission.

Pedro Azagra, chief development officer for Iberdrola, said "we are absolutely open" to projects in Maine, but the current development rights to wind power in the state are already sold.

If any of the rights holders decided to sell, Iberdrola would be interested, he said.

Iberdrola also would consider the offshore test sites, although Azagra noted that the whole concept of offshore wind power is really in its infancy.

There are many transmission, generation and pilot energy projects in the state right now. Any project would have to benefit taxpayers by providing revenue to the state, spur economic development and benefit ratepayers in the form of cheaper electricity, Baldacci said.

The state is seen as a regional leader in wind power; 95 percent of New England's installed wind power base is in Maine. Operations that are on line or under construction can produce 300 megawatts of power in Maine. Another 450 megawatts worth of generation is in the planning stages, Baldacci said.

The state has a goal of 2,000 megawatts of wind energy by 2015 and 3,000 megawatts by 2020, said Jack Cashman, a member of the Maine PUC.

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