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Tuesday, January 23, 2006

CONTACT: Senator Dave Wanzenried, 406-546-9442

Pat Dopler, President, Montana Green Electricity Buying Co-Op 406-690-2667

Wanzenried Measure Gives Green Light to \$32 Million Dollar Wind Energy Project in MT

Wanzenried, 33+ Co-Sponsors, Introduce SB 337 To Help US Gain Energy Independence

Helena, MT— State Senator Dave Wanzenried (D-Missoula) introduced legislation authorizing Montana green electricity buying cooperatives to own the windmills, lines and poles and other renewable generating equipment they need to produce clean renewable electricity and to interconnect it with Montana's electrical grid.

"This legislation gives many Montanans a chance to be part of the clean energy future while helping to make America energy independent," Wanzenried explained. "It also lets Montana's city dwellers support Montana ranchers and local economies by buying renewable electricity from Montana farm energy producers."

SB 337 will enable the Green Electricity Buying Cooperative of Billings to move forward with \$31.7 of wind energy generation projects already authorized for development near Billings and Ft. Peck. The legislation also will make it possible for Montana renewable energy cooperatives to effectively compete for the 2007 round of federal clean energy bonding.

"The bottom line," he said, "is that SB 337 will be a step toward keeping Montana families on their farms and will help revive the economies of our small towns."

The 2006 and upcoming 2007 rounds of green cooperative funding were authorized under provisions of US Energy Policy passed in the last two sessions of Congress. After a nationwide review of qualifying projects, the Internal Revenue Service authorized Montana's Green Electricity Buying Cooperative to issue \$31.7 million in zero interest bonds to finance the development of 20 megawatts of Montana wind energy.

"These exciting projects will provide enough electricity to power about 6000 Montana homes," said Sen. Greg Lind (D-Missoula), a co-sponsor, Chair of the Senate Natural Resources and Energy Committee.

The co-op issued bonds are not backed by any government agency and will not encumber any state or local bonding authority. However, in what is called asset-based financing, the Green Co-ops must own the windmills to be able to pledge them as security to back the projects. Wanzenried's bill gives the coops the legal authorization they need to own the renewable electrical generating equipment.

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-Wanzenried, Continued-

Each \$16 million, 10 megawatt project should provide approximately 12-16 jobs during the construction phase. Yellowstone and McCone Counties are each projected to receive about \$125,000 in additional yearly property tax revenues from the projects. Landowners where the wind turbines are located will receive \$1900 in annual lease payments for each megawatt of installed capacity until the bonds are paid for and then they will receive \$6000 annually per installed megawatt.

Rep. George Groesbeck (D-Butte), co-sponsor and Vice Co-Chair of the House Energy and Telecommunications Committee, said the measure “is good for Montana’s rural economy and paves the way for future energy projects like it. It’s a win-win situation for Montana.”

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