

RENEW Wisconsin Policy Brief

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Expanding Wisconsin's Renewable Electricity Standard & Wind Energy

Issue: Virtually all of Wisconsin's electric providers are now in compliance with Wisconsin's 10% renewable electricity standard (RES) by 2015, a policy which RENEW Wisconsin formulated and championed back in 2006. Despite meeting the law early, Wisconsin is already behind our neighbors: Illinois and Minnesota have both set a 25% renewable standard by 2025, and Iowa derived more than 24% of the electricity generated in-state from renewable resources in 2012, mostly from wind energy (with another \$1.9 billion of investment in additional wind energy underway). Beginning in 2016, new large hydro (>60 MW capacity) will be eligible to comply with the Wisconsin RES.

Wind energy accounted for approximately 64% of the renewable electricity sold by Wisconsin utilities in 2012, with two-thirds of it originating in Iowa and Minnesota. Wisconsin currently has 13 utility-scale wind projects, ranging in size from 1.3 megawatts (Byron) to 162 megawatts (Glacier Hills), for a total of 648 megawatts (MW). In comparison, Iowa has 5,133 MW, Illinois 3,568, Minnesota 2,987, Indiana 1,543, and Michigan 988. There are many other locations in Wisconsin that could accommodate additional wind energy development, and two projects--Quilt Block in Lafayette County and Highland Wind in St. Croix County--have acquired siting permits. **However, Wisconsin's current RES is too modest to be a market driver for these prospects, and none of the electricity providers in Wisconsin has disclosed future plans to increase renewable energy supplies.**

2013 Updates: The last utility-owned renewable generation facility leveraged by the current RES, We Energies' 50 MW biomass cogeneration plant in Rothschild, was placed in service in fall 2013. Apart from Epic Systems' 10 MW Galactic wind farm in Dane County, erected in 2012 and interconnected in 2013, there were no additions to Wisconsin's wind generation fleet this year. The battle to permit Emerging Energies' 102.5 MW Highland Wind Farm was nothing short of brutal. The developers overcame the Public Service Commission's initial denial in March, and secured a siting certificate in October only after the agency agreed to a limited rehearing. Lacking a power purchase agreement, the project may or may not go forward in 2014. On the wind siting front, Sen. Frank Lasee and other legislators hostile to wind power introduced bills designed to foreclose further development in the state. While these bills have not advanced, they sent a chilling effect on wind development activities here. In contrast to Wisconsin's situation, Michigan's Republican governor supports an increased RES in that state, and their PSC reported that a 30% RES could be met.

2014 Needs: Once a leader but now a laggard among Midwestern states, Wisconsin would benefit from a fresh set of policy drivers to expand the renewable energy content in the state's electricity.

An expanded Renewable Electricity Standard, along with a distributed renewable generation requirement, would create investment and revenue-generating opportunities worth billions of dollars for Wisconsin companies, local governments, and citizens, while spurring job formation and reducing dependence on imported fossil fuels.