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Picture of wind energy generation in the Great Lakes takes shape in Cleveland

Cleveland, Oh. – The State, provincial and federal officials, wind developers and other stakeholders tackled tough questions at the meeting of the Great Lakes Wind Collaborative this week in Cleveland, including environmental and social impacts and a regulatory landscape that is still evolving.

The third annual meeting of the Great Lakes Wind Collaborative (GLWC) brought together over 125 participants including U.S. and Canadian federal, state and provincial agency personnel along with interested stakeholders from the wind energy industry, academics and non-governmental organizations. “The Great Lakes Wind Collaborative’s annual gathering of stakeholders is another step toward capturing the region’s \$100 billion wind potential,” noted Larry Flowers, principal project manager at the National Renewable Energy Laboratory. The meeting was hosted by Case Western Reserve University and facilitated by the Great Lakes Commission, which coordinates the Collaborative from its office in Ann Arbor, Michigan.

“We are all here because we recognize that when we talk about creating a dynamic wind power economy on the Great Lakes, many, if not most, of the needed qualities exist in all of our states,” said keynote speaker Sean Logan, director of the Ohio Department of Natural Resources. “Our qualities have proven their value in the past. But we are opening a new chapter here. It asks all of us to think, and act, in new ways.”

Among the states and provinces, there was plenty of activity to report, particularly in the area of offshore wind turbine development in the Great Lakes and St. Lawrence River. Among those moving ahead most aggressively in this area are New York and Ohio, which are actively reviewing offshore wind proposals.

However, Ontario, which has a streamlined approval process for onshore and offshore wind proposals and has the first power purchase agreement for offshore wind in the Great Lakes, is slowing down some of its activity as it takes a closer look at environmental constraints.

Ohio and Michigan, with less installed capacity than most other Great Lakes states to date, have made recent decisions that will substantially increase wind capacity in each of those states. Indiana, Illinois and Minnesota, which already produce over 1,000 megawatts of wind each, also have new projects and initiatives underway to increase capacity and improve decisions with respect to reducing wildlife impacts.

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Great Lakes Commission

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On that same front, Pennsylvania discussed its unique “voluntary cooperative agreement” where projects can limit liability with respect to wildlife impacts by agreeing to follow a series of protection protocols, including pre and post-construction monitoring of bird and bat impacts.

Wisconsin described pending rules to establish state-level siting regulations, and Québec’s report included a related announcement of a water turbine pilot project that has two underwater river turbines in the St. Lawrence River in an underwater application of the wind turbine concept. The meeting also included sessions on the economic impact of wind, wind wildlife impacts and regional infrastructure capacity and needs.

Addressing the need for federal, state and provincial regulatory agencies to accelerate and fine tune development of the regulatory playing field, Ohio DNR Director Logan emphasized the “need to get it right and get it right quickly.” He cited the 2008 Great Lakes St. Lawrence Water Resources Compact as a model of how the region has historically worked together, saying, “The Compact proved that we can accomplish more when we act cooperatively. It proved that the world takes the health and sustainability of the Great Lakes as seriously as we do. And now, I think we are just beginning to see just how closely the world is watching how we manage our race to bring wind power to the Great Lakes.”

In other action, the GLWC elected Cathryn Loucas, deputy director of the Ohio DNR, as its new co-chair, replacing Joyce McLean of Toronto Hydro. Loucas will serve alongside existing co-chair Terry Yonker from Youngstown, New York, who said, “States, provinces and both Canadian and U.S. federal governments have expressed agreement in the shared responsibility and need for steps to ensure that wind power development in the Great Lakes is both economically and environmentally sustainable.”

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The Great Lakes Commission, chaired by Illinois Gov. Patrick Quinn, is an interstate compact agency established under state and U.S. federal law and dedicated to promoting a strong economy, healthy environment and high quality of life for the Great Lakes-St. Lawrence region and its residents. The Commission consists of governors’ appointees, state legislators and agency officials from its eight member states. Associate membership for Ontario and Québec was established through the signing of a “Declaration of Partnership.” The Commission maintains a formal Observer program involving U.S. and Canadian federal agencies, tribal authorities, binational agencies and other regional interests. The Commission offices are located in Ann Arbor, Michigan.