

Region continues move toward wind development

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Energy development is nothing new in the Great Falls area.

The city is nicknamed the Electric City because of the five hydroelectric dams on the Missouri River, which produce 225 megawatts of electricity.

But power projects are taking off anew in the region, powered by the state's powerful wind.

In 2009:

- NaturEner USA completed construction of the 210-megawatt Glacier Wind Farm near Shelby north of Great Falls. The \$500 million wind farm, which falls in Toole and Glacier counties, is now Montana's largest, surpassing the 135-megawatt Judith Gap wind farm in Wheatland County which was completed in 2006.

"This wind farm is one of the reasons Montana is on the map as a leader in wind energy development," Gov. Brian Schweitzer said at the groundbreaking ceremony for the Glacier Wind Farm.

Statewide, electricity powered by wind now stands at 271.5 megawatts. A single megawatt is enough to power 250-300 homes.

NaturEner is now planning to build a 300-megawatt wind farm called Rim Wind Farm north of the Glacier project.

- The state approved the first phase of another wind farm, this one planned by Horizon Wind Energy, near Martinsdale. The total project, which is 300 megawatts, is planned on state and private land. The first phase calls for building 87.5 megawatts of power. "We're anxious to get it built and up and running," said project manager Joy Potter, who is based in a Horizon Wind Energy field office in Washington.

Demand for renewable energy is going up because states are passing laws requiring the use of a certain percentage of green power.

In early 2010, Tonbridge Power Co. also began initial construction of a \$215 million transmission line between Great Falls and Lethbridge, Alberta.

Three wind developers, including NaturEner, have purchased capacity on the line.

Wind developments are not the only energy-related developments in the region.

Southern Montana Electric Generation and Transmission, a coalition of rural electric cooperatives and Electric City Power, the city's utility arm, announced plans in 2009 to construct a natural gas plant eight miles east of Great Falls.

And PPL Montana, the owner of the five hydro facilities on the Missouri near Great Falls, broke ground on a \$195 million upgrade to the Rainbow Dam, which would add 24 megawatts to the 34-megawatt dam.