

Fairbanks Daily News Miner Guest Editorial

Richard D. Seifert  
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At this year's annual Golden Valley Electric Association membership meeting on 15th April, a question was raised by a member of GVEA regarding what happened to GVEA's commitment to do a wind power study in keeping with the law suit that was brought by some local Fairbanksans. The idea of looking at wind is certainly a valid one and I, as a professor and energy specialist at the University in Fairbanks, was particularly interested in following up on this.

The question that was asked at GVEA annual meeting was, "What has happened?" It is a very important and appropriate question to ask. Frank Abegg, production manager at GVEA responded first. He has worked with me cooperatively, in trying to get this work funded and underway. However the real hang-up has not been in proposing the work but getting it funded by the Alaska Science and Technology Foundation. If a reasonable funding arrangement can be worked out, we'd be happy to do this work.

I used the opportunity to apply the \$25,000 to equipment purchases, money which resulted from the litigation brought for the Healy Clean Coal program. It was dedicated to investigation of wind power options. This money is held in trust by the Trustees of Alaska to investigate valid wind energy options in the Healy area and anywhere else that we might wish to investigate (like Delta Junction). I proposed to do this twice to Alaska Science and Technology Foundation. Both times the proposal was not funded even though the \$25,000 match was available should it be funded from Trustees for Alaska.

Without going into a great deal of detail as to why this happened, what has resulted is absolutely nothing has been done, and no progress has been made toward the important goal of developing Alaska's renewable energy resources. That ultimately is the real goal, and this was just one step that could have been very positively taken toward that end. As an energy scientist for Alaska and someone who is very interested in utilizing renewable energy, this is a great disappointment. An important issue needs to be clarified. It is the context in which the state forces one to enter this kind of agreement that makes work like this, which is essentially fundamental research in energy assessment, difficult to do. But my effort failed this time because it is difficult to procure funding for wind assessment in Alaska, for Alaska.

I want to use this opportunity to say that the state is not paying enough attention to renewable energy resources, particularly wind. It's not paying enough attention to hydroelectricity either, and certainly not enough to solar options. While direct solar may never be a dominant energy source here, coupled with wind, it could be very significant, since wind has a winter peak (typically) and solar has a summer peak. I am not claiming this in any off-handed or uninformed way. I have studied these options for most of my professional career. Not only am I convinced, but I can point to a great deal of resource and evidentiary data, that supports my contention. Alaska could function quite remarkably well on renewable energy. We could be a net exporter, by creating surplus energy as stored hydrogen, and by utilizing our vast renewable energy resources, particularly wind and hydro with supplementary solar wherever that was possible, for basic in-state use.

It's difficult to make this case in the present context of Alaska where the only perceived virtuous energy source is oil. It is remarkable to imagine what could happen to Alaska and to the rest of the world, if we could remove fossil fuel from the energy combustion cycle. It is not at all impossible to do so. It only takes a commitment of will and resources to achieve the capitalization of equipment and energy production systems to afford us that option. I am pursuing those and trying to keep abreast of them in the interests of Alaska. My role at the University of Alaska serves the public interest toward that end. I urge all Alaskans to become more informed on the renewable energy options for Alaska and to pursue their exploitation and development. While other things may preoccupy us at this time, the ultimate potential for renewable energy to carry Alaska forward for hundreds of year into the future, is very real and is inevitable. I appreciate this opportunity to clear up some of these matters and to help make a case for a renewable economy, which is the only sustainable future we have in Alaska.

Richard Seifert  
Energy and Housing Specialist, Professor  
University of Alaska Fairbanks