The Wind Alliance

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As pointed out in the Dallas Morning News by reporter Eric Torbenson, "Texas leads the nation in wind power with 10,000 megawatts, far eclipsing runner-up Iowa with 3,670 megawatts. Because Texas controls its own power grid, it was able to start a program to link wind farms in the west and north with the state's biggest population centers – called a Competitive Renewable Energy Zone project – without having to fight other states over the $5 billion cost and direction."
http://www.dallasnews.com/sharedcontent/dws/bus/stories/DN-wind_01bus.ART0.State.Edition1.1d2372c.html

And according to the latest Opportunity Houston article by Matt Smith entitled *From Boomtown to Green Town*, Houston has 15 wind energy companies. In fact, the Greater Houston Partnership's Energy Collaborative was instrumental in attracting the Danish blade manufacturing company Vestas to set up their Technology R&D Americas operation in Houston because its strength as the energy capital included important wind customers of Vestas. Dr. Michael Massey (previously UH) played an integral role touting the emerging Lone Star Wind Alliance, as it was named at the time, as a vehicle for Vestas to become more integrally engaged in accelerating the development of the wind industry here in the United States.

The American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) has championed the DOE's 20% of power generation coming from wind by 2030. AWEA's July 2009 annual report card on this target came out a solid B. And wind turbines are getting more powerful with three-megawatt designs for low wind conditions, and six-megawatt offshore turbines. However, the changing natural gas landscape here in the United States with new shale gas plays in particular have provided some headwind to the renewable industry with low prices in the $4 per million British thermal units range this year.

But wind has some intriguing attributes as Wally Lafferty, Vestas Technology Americas Vice President and Managing Director pointed out in Smith's Opportunity Houston article, "We strongly believe that wind can stand on its own, on par with oil and gas, and a leading resource for energy. The fact that wind is completely renewable, and that you can accurately predict the cost of wind as a fuel, which can always be free, makes wind power a more attractive energy resource than any other." Wind power generation also saves water, a growing problem, not only from the 20 billion gallons used for steam or cooling conventional plants, but the tremendous volume used in hydraulic fracturing for shale gas coupled with the environmental issues associated with the frac water.

AWEA and others are seeking a National Energy Renewable Standard that would call for 25% of the nation's electricity to come from renewables by 2025. But federal standards such as this are just pipe dreams without a critical mass of the important constituencies

working in tandem to create the momentum and necessary constructs. The important constituencies make up industry, academia, economic development organizations, and government entities at all levels. That was the idea behind the formation of The Wind Alliance originated at the University of Houston and supported by the Greater Houston Partnership's Energy Collaborative. The GHP saw The Wind Alliance as a platform to facilitate the development of a strong wind cluster in Houston. It has continued to evolve and stretched beyond the borders of Texas as its own entity now. I asked the team at The Wind Alliance to give you a more detailed picture of what the organization is all about and here is what they had to say.

"The Wind Alliance (the "Alliance") develops infrastructure, technology and workforce through pre-competitive collaborative projects between industry, academia and government within the U.S. The Alliance, headquartered in Houston, Texas, is an independent, 501(c)(3) non-profit led by John D. White.

From think-tank to action, the Alliance is the vehicle where the best and brightest minds throughout the wind energy industry work together to identify, incubate, and solve problems. With three active operating committees, the Alliance's structure uniquely focuses on pushing the industry forward to achieve the significant and important national wind energy goals of 2030.

The Wind Alliance is involved in a portfolio of large-scale projects:

National Institute for Renewable Energy ("NIRE"): NIRE, an initiative of the Innovate Texas Foundation and The Texas Tech University System, has partnered with the Alliance to provide services, technology and systematic communication to its members. These two organizations will complement each other in that the Alliance will offer a forum for problem identification and solution incubation, and NIRE will manifest the results of these goals in tangible competitive and pre-competitive projects.
Naval Station Ingleside: The Alliance is working with the Texas A&M University System and the Texas General Land Office to redevelop the naval base into a major renewable energy research and training center.

The three Alliance committees are involved in a number of smaller-scale projects.

Workforce Committee: A workforce assessment has been initiated to address the growth challenges of the industry, the result of which will be a planning document that will be used to project workforce demand, develop training curricula and design and implement industry-based programs. The Workforce Committee is also developing a very highly anticipated set of general workforce and safety standards – to be distributed this fall. This committee has kicked-off an engaging wind energy outreach program for primary and secondary schools. The outreach program is geared towards urban schools and will educate students about how wind energy works. Finally, this committee is creating a scholarship foundation for students seeking wind energy careers.

Infrastructure Committee: The Infrastructure committee is working with a set of law schools to identify and document regional wind farm development standards and requirements within the wind corridor. This project will include (by region) a list of hurdles that must be complied with, a general timeline to accomplish requirements within, cost to accomplish requirements, resources needed, risk exposure, permitting requirements, necessary forms and other regional development requirements. The project will also determine a rating system with which regions may be compared as to cost, time, and other important factors.

Technology Committee: A technology scan is proposed to identify and examine emerging research and innovations that are affecting the different levels of the wind energy value chain. The technology scan will provide industry and academia with an inventory of emerging developments and different universities' areas of focus. This project will help eliminate duplication of work and enable technology to be developed and put into practice more quickly.

The Wind Alliance holds two all-member meetings each year, one in the fall and one in the spring in an effort to identify issues and strategically deploy resources."

You can find out more about The Wind Alliance at http://www.TheWindAlliance.org.