



News Release

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NMCC to offer new program in Wind Power Technology to support emerging Maine industry; regional partners instrumental in program development and implementation

Aroostook County - With the first commercial wind farm in Maine located just 14 miles from its campus in Mars Hill, Northern Maine Community College in Presque Isle is now poised to offer the only program in New England to train wind power technicians.

The Maine Community College System Board of Trustees today formally approved a proposal brought forth by the northernmost campus to introduce a wind power technology program. College officials plan to offer initial courses as early as this coming January, with the intent of bringing the full program on line next fall.

“Given the recent and current activity in our region, and the discussion statewide about the tremendous potential for further development of wind power throughout Maine, as well as in neighboring New England states and Canadian Maritime provinces, this program will meet both an immediate and an emerging need throughout the region,” said NMCC President Timothy Crowley. “We believe the wind power technology program will provide a valuable and needed resource for entities that erect turbines, as well as excellent placement opportunities for future graduates of the College.”

Wind power technicians are responsible for the operation, maintenance and repair of wind turbine generators. Prospective employers include wind farm owners/operators and turbine manufacturers who frequently contract with owner/operators to provide maintenance and support. Current entry level wages for a wind technician are \$18 to \$22 per hour.

“NMCC’s Wind Power Technology program is a great example of the community colleges’ ability to respond quickly to the workforce needs of business and industry. The program will offer students the skills they need to qualify for good jobs close to home,” said Maine Community College System President John Fitzsimmons.

A report released earlier this year by a task force assembled by Governor John Baldacci to consider issues of wind power development in Maine recommended that the state host two gigawatts of wind power by 2015 and three gigawatts by 2020. According to the U.S. Department of Energy's Job and Economic Development Impact model, to host two gigawatts of power by the targeted deadline, at least 180 field technicians, administrators and managers will be needed.

Conservative estimates indicate Aroostook County has the potential to realize 50 to 80 new, long-term, highly skilled, high-wage technical positions in operation and maintenance for wind farms between 2009 and 2012. Additional employment opportunities are anticipated in neighboring northern Washington County, in Franklin County in western Maine, and in the Atlantic Provinces. A two-year technical degree is the desired credential for entry into these positions.

"You open up your newspaper these days and there is almost invariably something in it about wind power. Plans for wind farms are being sketched out across the state, and these farms are going to need technicians to service the turbines. The new wind power technology program at NMCC is designed to prepare a workforce for meeting that need, and is specifically designed not only to prepare new students for work in this field, but to re-train existing electronics professionals as well," said Alan Punches, NMCC vice president and academic dean.

Work on establishing the curriculum for the wind power technology program was completed over the past year by NMCC faculty and staff in collaboration with wind developers and energy utilities who indicated to the College that the presence of a trained workforce will significantly enhance their ability to develop wind energy projects in the region.

"We are very excited about the new wind power technology curriculum and look forward to working with staff and faculty at Northern Maine Community College as this program develops. Educating a skilled workforce to support regional wind projects is an integral part of developing wind power that holds much promise for the economy of northern Maine," said Maine Public Service Company President and CEO Brent M. Boyles. "We are looking at a whole new industry emerging in our area, which includes constructing a bulk transmission power line to electrically connect northern Maine to New England and creating 'green' jobs for wind operators and technicians in the renewable energy sector."

Currently, MPS has 1,250 megawatts of renewable energy interconnection requests and provides power transmission delivery for excess existing generation located in northern Maine including the 42 megawatt Mars Hill wind farm. Future projects have the potential to stimulate additional jobs, as well as research and development initiatives in renewable energy. The multiplier impacts of wind farms and constructing a new transmission line will be significant to Aroostook County.

Boyles noted that one developer projects hiring approximately 930 construction workers for the wind projects alone, as well as 95 permanent jobs to maintain the various facilities. "Training wind operators and technicians to support renewable energy projects, particularly wind, is an excellent opportunity for students and for the new emerging businesses in our area," said Boyles.

NMCC is ideally suited to provide wind power technology instruction. The College has existing programs in electrical construction and maintenance and computer electronics, two fields that serve as the foundations for the multi-disciplinary industry of wind power.

Demand in the electrical construction and maintenance program for this fall prompted college officials to add an additional cohort of freshmen students. Enrollment in that associate degree program has risen by 18 percent over last fall.

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Northern Maine Community College President Timothy Crowley (left) is joined by Maine Public Service Company President and CEO Brent Boyles and MPS Communication Director Virginia Joles in announcing NMCC's new Wind Power Technology Program.



Ryan Fonbuena, operations manager for First Wind, the company that runs the Mars Hill Wind Farm, stands at the base of one of the turbines on the Aroostook County mountain. Currently the largest wind power production facility in Maine, the Mars Hill project will benefit from the wind power technology program that will begin next year at Northern Maine Community College.