

Foreign groups eye Maine's wind potential

A recent trade mission could lead to \$18 million in sales and contracts, a group says.

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AUGUSTA — At least two foreign business groups plan to visit Maine to explore wind power investment possibilities, following the governor's trade mission to Spain, Germany and Norway last month.

StatoilHydro is expected in mid-November. The Norwegian energy giant has the only deep-water wind turbine off its coast, and it has an agreement with the University of Maine to explore the feasibility of putting such a turbine in the Gulf of Maine.

StatoilHydro officials want to further the agreement with the university while in Maine, and they plan to tour companies that might be involved in making and erecting such a turbine.

A Spanish investment group plans to visit Maine in late fall or early winter to look at the potential for onshore wind farms in the state, said Janine Bisailon-Cary, director of the Maine International Trade Center.

She spoke to about 16 businesspeople who went on the trade mission and gathered Wednesday at the Blaine House to discuss what they had accomplished on the mission and their plans for the future.

Bisailon-Cary said companies on the trade mission, which was focused on wind power, are projecting about \$18 million in potential contracts and sales generated by the trip — more than double any other trade mission.

The companies included Bath Iron Works, Cianbro Corp., Reed & Reed Construction, James W. Sewall Co., Larkin Enterprises, Sullivan & Merritt, Sargent Corp., Central Maine Power Co. and Sprague Energy.

On Wednesday, officials from those companies and organizations compared notes and suggested next steps.

Paul Williamson of the Maine Composites Alliance said he is exploring training options for Mainers in the wind field.

He met with a German group that is testing a floating offshore wind platform and may have interest in working with Maine on a similar model.

Richard Larkin of Larkin Enterprises said he had identified a lack of skilled, trained technicians to maintain turbines. The trade mission solidified that observation, said Larkin, who is working with Northern Maine Community College to develop a program to train workers for jobs here and around the world.

Steve Levesque, director of the Midcoast Regional Redevelopment Authority, which is seeking to redevelop the soon-to-be-closed Brunswick Naval Air Station, said he met with companies in hopes of attracting investment or businesses to the base. He was particularly interested in an industrial park the group toured in Bremerhaven, Germany, that was geared to wind power companies.

"It really became pretty clear to us we can replicate what they've done in Bremerhaven in the Brunswick area," he said.

To begin producing wind turbine tower structures, a shipyard like BIW would need minor capital investments and space to work, said Andrew Bond, director of labor and business planning. Baldacci said he'd want to know about any help the state could give BIW in the financial or policy arenas.

While the state must cut about \$200 million to balance its budget, it also must continue to make strategic investments in its future, said Baldacci.

John Henshaw, executive director of the Maine Port Authority, said the visit showed the need for areas around Maine's ports that could store huge turbine pieces. The state may want to explore buying industrial parcels in key locations, he said.

Parker Hadlock of Cianbro wasn't on the trip, but he has been exploring wind power through the governor's Ocean Energy Task Force. He said that the federal government must come up with a national policy on wind power. Until it does, foreign companies will see U.S. investment as risky, he said.

Hadlock pushed the need for an umbrella organization to pull along university research, industry and government in support of offshore wind power. Baldacci suggested that such a group should be industry-led.

Maine is in a position to become a leader in offshore wind power, said Baldacci, and it needs to seize the opportunity.

"You have to have energy to exist, to do business, to live," he said. "I'm not going to resign Maine to being on the receiving end. I want us to be on the ownership side."

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