



Renewable energy conference should be in Pendleton in 2011

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KENNEWICK, Wash. The promise of renewable energy to help power our future attracted more than 500 people to Kennewick, Wash., a couple of weeks ago.

Experts from as far as Washington, D.C., traveled to the Three Rivers Convention Center Feb. 7-9 for the 10th Annual Harvesting Clean Energy Conference. They talked about everything from biochar to wood waste and included many topics of interest to residents - particularly farmers - in Umatilla and Morrow counties.

Seven panel discussions during the three-day workshop focused on Northwest feedstocks. Six helped participants learn how to finance rural energy projects.

Speakers at three workshops discussed new energy opportunities in irrigated agriculture. One featured the principal of Hydrovolts Inc. of Seattle, who displayed his company's new instream turbine for irrigation canals. It looks like a paddlewheel that would power a riverboat, but its flipwing design allows flowing water to turn it, generating power while the paddles open and close. That allows fish and other waterborne stuff to pass.

Instream generation is nothing new, but it appears Hydrovolts has built a better contraption that could benefit some irrigation districts. Chuck Wilcox, manager of the Hermiston Irrigation District, said his and other districts always are looking for ways to generate revenue to help cut costs to their patrons.

While an irrigation district could employ an instream turbine for its patrons' benefit, only private irrigation districts could allow water users to tap a canal's energy resources. Projects like the Hermiston district, built by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, aren't allowed instream devices without federal permitting.

Meanwhile, a Boeing executive offered some hope for camelina growers, saying the oilseed crop appeared to be the best feedstock for making biofuel for commercial aircraft. That was music to the ears of Don Wysocki, a soil scientist at the Columbia Basin Agricultural Research Center near Adams. He's been conducting camelina research for four years.

Wysocki was encouraged by what he heard and said scientists must move in the direction Boeing is pursuing.

Oregon's prowess in producing wind power gained the attention of Larry Flowers of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory in Golden, Colo. He said Oregon's electricity

output from wind generation will breeze past Washington's when projects that are on the drawing board are operating.

Photovoltaics, or power-generating solar panels, have been in use for decades, but another innovative Washington business, Infinia Corp. of Kennewick, displayed a unique heat-powered pistonless engine. The company has six test models operating in Kennewick. Set up to catch the sun's heat, they look somewhat like an early-day backyard TV satellite dish, employing a reflector to focus the heat onto the engine's collector side.

These and other innovators demonstrated that scientists and others still are working on new ideas to generate electricity from flowing water, wind, the sun and from various cultivated and waste feedstocks that either are plentiful in the Pacific Northwest, or could be.

This was the 10th annual Harvesting Clean Energy Conference. Last year's event was in Montana, but it's been in Portland in 2004 and 2008. Organizers haven't chosen a site for next year's event.

Climate Solutions, a nonprofit organization based in Olympia, Wash, which plans the conferences, should consider bringing it to Pendleton in 2011. Pat Kennedy at the Pendleton Convention Center says the facility can handle and feed groups of up to 750 easily. The facility has nine breakout rooms and Pendleton has sufficient lodging establishments to handle such a crowd. It could be a good deal for Pendleton and the alternative energy buffs as well.

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