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Yes, you can get there from here

Ideas, like schooners, require wind in their sails to move from here to there. Partnerships often are more able than agencies, foundations, businesses or individuals working alone to supply energy that keeps projects from lying dead in the water.

◆ Faced with sunset federal energy tax credits, Northwest Wind urgently needed to speed up permitting and siting in 2001 for a Sherman County wind farm. Wasco County Judge John Mabrey, with authority from Gov. John Kitzhaber, convened stakeholders to unglue sticking points.

One concern centered on birds, especially raptors, striking huge turbine blades. Another collision threatened at the intersection of property rights and resource use. A downwind landowner might be denied optimal use of the wind if an upwind landowner built a wind turbine too close.

Farmers, the developer, the Bonneville Power Administration, the Audubon Society, and state and federal wildlife agencies partnered to reach agreements on turbine design, setbacks from property lines and operation monitoring before the project went to a conditional use hearing.

They met the deadline. Family-farm landowners have income from sites leased for 16 towers that feed 24 megawatts into the Northwest power grid. Sherman County has become an exporter of clean, alternative energy.

◆ A pact in Wallowa County among nonprofits, local businesses and state and federal agencies aims to achieve a balance of natural resources, family-wage jobs and community vitality.

Wallowa Resources, a nonprofit in Enterprise, is helping a local mill and private landowners to grow, harvest and process small-diameter trees in ways that improve the region's forest health and economic vitality.

A mill in Joseph has obtained chain-of-custody certification under Forest Stewardship Council guidelines to take advantage of the market niche for certified forest products. Certification assures buyers that products from the mill have been grown, harvested and processed in conformity with strict environmental standards.

Commentary

◆ A 13-county partnership, Libraries of Eastern Oregon, is working to update and link library resources. Also, in collaboration with the Oregon Museum of Science and Industry and the Frontier Learning Network, the library group is engaged in a project to develop high-speed Internet access to serve 40 communities, 10 public school districts and 40 public libraries.

◆ Twenty-four other partnerships are in stages of evolution. The bistate Lower Columbia Solutions Group is searching for sustainable disposal sites for dredge material. Partners are working in the Hood River Valley to develop fish-friendly screens for the local irrigation district. A regional biogas project in Myrtle Point aims to reduce costs of storing and disposing of farm wastes and provide methane for industrial processes. Carbon-offsets for Portland-area motorists; downtown revitalizations in Springfield and La Grande; and watershed and habitat restoration in Eugene and for the Pudding River are other projects bringing multiple stakeholders into alliances.

These coalitions didn't form accidentally. Oregon Solutions (www.policyconsensus.org/npcc.html) nurtured them. It is a program to implement projects of the National Policy Consensus Center at Portland State University. "What we are doing is finding a way to solve place-based problems through consensus," says Greg Wolf, Oregon Solutions director. The center grew out of converging state/private desires.

Starting with an executive order by Gov. John Kitzhaber that led to the 2001 Oregon Sustainability Act, the state identified 10 objectives communities should pursue to thrive. At the same time, the nonprofit Policy Consensus Initiative wanted to open a national center to link public policy and consensus-building in ways that lead to completion of projects at the community level. Kitzhaber agreed to head the national organization. It, in turn, placed the center at PSU.

Oregon Solutions, using respected local convenors imprinted with authority from the governor, is putting wind into the sails of good ideas. That might become one of Kitzhaber's most valuable public service legacies.

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