

Wait is over for wave-energy facility to buoy up Reedsport

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With grave losses in timber jobs and unemployment rates well above the state average, Reedsport has been waiting five years for respite in the form of a new commercial wave-energy facility.

Now, with the announcement that Oregon Iron Works will begin construction on the first of 10 gigantic wave-energy buoys to be located off the coast of Reedsport, the wait is over.

"Good things come to those who wait," Reedsport Mayor Keith Tymchuk said, "which is something the Beavers (football team) will have to figure out."

Already suffering from the closure of a paper mill in nearby Gardiner, Reedsport's economy absorbed another blow in 2007 when Central Oregon & Pacific Railroad shut down a rail line between Vaughn and Coquille.

"One of our largest employers, American Bridge Corp., is hurting because (it) can't transport (its) goods on the railroad," Tymchuk said. "We're suffering with jobs."

Jobs also were a concern in 2004, when Oregon State University began studying the potential for a wave-energy facility in Reedsport. Tymchuk faced backlash from local fishermen and crabbers concerned that the facility would impact their livelihood.

"There were very legitimate concerns among fishermen and crabbers," Tymchuk said. "By pairing wave power with our marine resources, they were concerned it would lead to a loss of ocean resources. Scientists thought there was a huge source of juice in the ocean, but back then this was all hypothetical."

But today, wave energy is real. Mark Draper, CEO of Ocean Power Technologies, which designed the buoys, said his company has experienced success with wave-energy facilities in New Jersey, Hawaii, Spain and Scotland.

"There is the potential to harness thousands of megawatts of energy from the sea," Draper said. "And we tend to build our projects using 70 to 80 percent local labor."

Chandra Brown, vice president of Oregon Iron Works in Clackamas County, said construction of the first buoy, expected to cost \$3 million to \$4 million, will employ 30 workers from her firm. Work on the 200-ton, 150-foot-tall buoy will begin in a couple of weeks, and is anticipated to finish in late 2010.

Sause Bros. of Coos Bay will transport and deploy the buoys, and jobs also will be created for their maintenance.

"Ideally, this project will put Reedsport at the head of an emerging industry," Tymchuk said. "There was a time 25 years ago when wind energy was hypothetical. Now it's here and it's real, and that's where we hope to go with wave energy."

Each buoy can create 150 kilowatts of energy, enough to power 75 homes, by using the rise and fall of waves to drive an electric generator inside the buoy. The electricity is then conditioned and transmitted as high-voltage power through an underwater cable. The plan is to route the electricity to Douglas County through the Gardiner Substation.

The project's first phase includes only one buoy. But the 10 combined will generate 1.5 megawatts of electricity for Douglas County.

"Once we start production of the other buoys, that will add up to another 150 jobs," said Philip Pellegrino, Ocean Power Technologies' vice president of North America business development.

Green jobs such as those related to the wave-energy facility are on the rise, according to Gov. Ted Kulongoski. A 2008 study shows that Oregon in the last decade created green jobs at a rate five times

faster than any other state. As of 2008, 51,000 people at 5,000 companies in Oregon were employed in jobs related to energy and sustainability.

"We need to step up and make these industries grow," House Speaker Dave Hunt, D-Clackamas County, said. "Every day we see small gains. This is a state investment in jobs and energy independence."

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