DOE and Hawaii To Prepare Programmatic EIS for Interisland Wind Energy Development

DOE and Hawaii's Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism (DBEDT) hosted four public scoping meetings for the Hawaii Interisland Renewable Energy Program: Wind Programmatic EIS (HIREP Wind EIS; DOE/EIS-0459), from February 1–5, 2011. These meetings were held on the islands of Oahu, Molokai, Lanai, and Maui – the four islands that could be affected by the development of a proposed interisland transmission cable system, wind generation facilities, and the necessary improvements to the electrical grid. DOE and Hawaii issued a Notice of Intent for the project on December 14, 2010 (75 FR 77859), and a Notice of Public Scoping Meetings for the HIREP Wind EIS on January 12, 2011 (76 FR 2095).

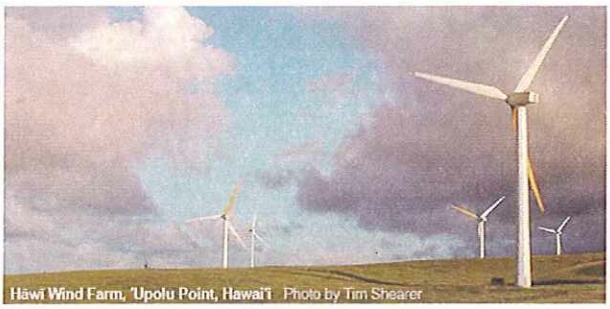
EIS Facts

- The HIREP Wind EIS is funded by the Recovery Act through a DOE State Energy Program grant.
- This programmatic EIS may lead to one or more subsequent, project-specific Federal actions and related NEPA reviews, such as development of wind generation facilities or an undersea interisland cable.
- The Hawaii Department of Business, Economic Development and Tourism is a co-lead agency in the preparation of the EIS.

Hawaii's Renewable Energy Standard

Because Hawaii derives nearly 90 percent of its primary energy resources from oil, the state is vulnerable to supply disruptions and high energy prices – electricity prices are more than twice the U.S. average. To address this issue, the Hawaii legislature recently mandated that 70 percent of Hawaii's energy needs be met with clean energy by 2030, including 40 percent from renewable energy and 30 percent from energy efficiency. The Hawaii statute establishes a timetable with interim goals, and requires full achievement of the "40/30 standard" by 2030 (Hawaii Revised Statutes, Chapters 269-91 through 269-95).

DOE and the State of Hawaii signed a Memorandum of Understanding in early 2008 forming a partnership to help achieve the 40/30 standard and reduce the state's high energy prices. DOE entered into this partnership, in part, because Section 355 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPAct 2005) required the Secretary of Energy to assess the economic implications of the dependence of Hawaii on oil, including the technical and economic feasibility of increasing the contribution of renewable energy resources for the generation of electricity on an island by island basis. DOE has conducted or funded a number of studies and workshops, prior to and since passage of the EPAct 2005, to help Hawaii achieve its goal of lower energy prices through improved efficiency and increased use of renewables.



Hāwī Wind Farm, 'Upolu Point, Hawai'i Photo by Tim Shearer

A Brighter Energy Future

The proposed action in the HIREP Wind EIS envisions a program that would develop up to 400 megawatts of wind energy on the islands of Maui, Lanai, and Molokai, transmission of that energy to Oahu, via undersea power cables, and transmission system upgrades on Oahu. The island of Oahu, with 80 percent of the state's population, is the island with the greatest energy demand; however, Oahu does not have adequate identified potential renewable energy sites of its own to be self-sufficient. Maui, Lanai, and Molokai have the most abundant and viable wind resources of those islands closest to Oahu.

The scoping meetings were well attended, with representatives from native Hawaiian groups, environmental groups, the general public, and local, state, and Federal governments. Each meeting included a "workshop" session where attendees could inspect poster boards, collect handouts, and talk with DOE and DBEDT representatives. The workshops were approximately one hour long, followed by formal sessions during which comments were transcribed. Stakeholders raised a broad range of issues during the scoping meetings, such as the potential effects on:

- cultural and religious sites and practices
- sensitive fish and wildlife species and their habitats
- the visual character of Molokai and Lanai
- necessary infrastructure upgrades on Molokai and Lanai
- access to subsistence hunting and fishing areas on Molokai and Lanai
- availability of water resources on Molokai and Lanai for concrete to produce wind turbine foundations.

Stakeholders also asked whether other renewable resources could be addressed in the alternatives analysis, and about post-operational restoration planning.

DOE and DBEDT will consider scoping comments in preparing the draft EIS, which is expected to be issued for public review later this year.