Project: Montana Energy Training Center

Brief Description: The campuses of Montana State University in Billings, Great Falls and Havre (Northern) request funding to create a multi-site regional energy training center to develop the workforce needed by Montana's emerging energy sector. The funding will continue to train and retrain skilled workers who can fill high-priority jobs, as defined by industry and labor partners in various energy sectors. A combination of delivery modes will be utilized, including classroom, on-line instruction, on-site training and others, so that the expertise from each of the campuses can be shared with the others.

Executive Summary: This request is to create a multi-site Montana Energy Training Center to develop the workforce needed by several aspects of Montana's emerging energy sector. This project will likely serve the workforce development needs not just of Montana, but of a much wider area in the western United States. It will expand existing energy programs offered by the three campuses and their partners, while developing programs targeted to wind to electricity (Great Falls), programs and equipment to complement a Mobile Energy Training Lab used to offer training at employer work sites and educational sites, (Billings), and sustainable technologies including, bio-fuels, bio-lubricants, fuel and oil additives, wind, solar and future green technologies (Northern).

Project Description: This project will combine and coordinate the growing and improving capabilities of three Montana State University campuses in order to create a powerful statewide resource for curriculum development, public outreach and training for workers in the state's energy industries. Training in technologies that serve both the ongoing fossil energy industry and the rapidly emerging 'alternative' energy sector will be developed and delivered in both credential based programs and in short-term outreach settings. The goal is to produce cross-trained technicians who are able to contribute in several energy technologies for design, installation and maintenance.

Congressional Action Needed: An appropriation of $1 million is requested for this three-campus initiative.

Importance to Montana: Energy has always played a major role in Montana's economic story. Although that story has been dominated by coal, water and natural gas, renewable energy in the form of solar, wind and plants along with improved coal technologies have come to the front of the state's imagination.

Montana ranks second in the nation in wind power capacity and has the potential to provide 20% of the nation's wind energy. There is the potential for more than a thousand new commercial wind technician jobs in Montana alone. According to the Montana Department of Commerce, small wind systems grew 300% between 2008 and 2009 and are expected to continue grow at a rapid pace during the next decade. The Great Falls campus will take the lead in wind technologies.

In southeastern Montana, the huge coal reserves have sparked international interest in the development of a coal to gas to electricity complex that would be both a significant source of much needed energy in the west and a massive economic development opportunity for the Crow and Northern Cheyenne communities. The economy of south- central and Eastern Montana is increasingly dependent on collaborative efforts to maximize the potential of the robust energy industry and resulting construction trades. This initiative will develop a reliable pool of trained workers to immediately increase productivity for Montana companies. MSU Billings will take the lead in this arena.

The viability of processing oil seed crops into diesel fuel has been demonstrated and programs are underway to capitalize this work to improve processes so that utilization of these crops to produce fuel on a commercial level can become a reality. MSU-Northern will grow its sustainable energy program to provide one and two-year degrees in green energy technologies, installation and maintenance. Courses will include biofuels, bio-lubricants, wind technologies, solar, alternative heating and cooling, and energy efficiency technologies for commercial and residential buildings.

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