Wind power surpasses record peak in Calif.

Colin Sullivan, Environment & Energy Publishing, 4-26-11

Wind production in California hit a record peak last week of 2,432 megawatts available statewide, accounting for about 5 percent of total electricity demand, according to the state's grid operator.

The California Independent System Operator, or Cal ISO, said in a statement that this year's peak wind power outpaced last year's record of 1,915 MW. Peak refers to the amount of generation available when demand is highest.

The assessment came as part of the ISO's summer estimate for 2011. The report says peak power demand in the state is expected to reach 47,814 MW this summer, up from the actual peak of 47,127 MW from a year ago.

The study attributes the 1.5 percent uptick in total demand to what the ISO called "a modest economic recovery" in the state. A 33 percent renewable power standard by 2020 was credited for helping to spark the surge in wind power.

Adding to the positive outlook on the renewable energy front for the summer is news that California's snowpack is 160 percent of normal for this time of year. The heavy snow year means fast stream flows could fuel a glut in hydroelectricity, the ISO said.

In all, the state has about 7,300 MW of renewable energy online. Geothermal is next after wind in the state, at 21 percent of the renewable capacity, followed by small hydro (16 percent), biomass (9 percent), solar (6 percent) and biogas (3 percent).

The largest generation source in the state is natural gas, which accounts for 68 percent of in-state produced power. Hydro is next (16 percent), followed by nuclear power (9 percent) and then renewables.