

Total wind power growing in Calif.

Anne C. Mulkern, *Environment & Energy Publishing*, 1-31-12

Wind-generated electricity now makes up 5 percent of California's power, a trade group said today as it lobbied Congress to extend a tax incentive.

Developers added 921 megawatts of wind projects in the Golden State last year, enough to juice more than 400,000 homes, the California Wind Energy Association (CalWEA) said. Wind power capacity in the state now is 3,927 MW, the association said.

"The total amount of wind energy installations in 2011 created a banner year for wind generation in California and is helping to drive California closer to reaching its goal of 33 percent renewable energy," said Nancy Rader, CalWEA's executive director. "The investments companies are making in California to develop wind energy projects is a boon for cleaner air and greener energy, and also for creating jobs and retooling manufacturing here and across the country."

California has a mandate that green energy make up 33 percent of the electricity generated in the state by 2020. It is the most ambitious renewable portfolio standard in the country.

The Obama administration, meanwhile, has set a goal of having 20 percent of the country's electricity supply generated from wind sources by 2030. Meeting that target would require construction of thousands of wind turbines, mostly in the West and Midwest.

The CalWEA announcement comes as the trade group and the American Wind Energy Association (AWEA) push for lawmakers to extend a tax credit for wind energy production. Set to expire at the end of this year, the credit grants renewable energy producers a 2.2-cent-per-kilowatt-hour subsidy for the first 10 years of their facility's operation.

Lobbying on the incentive comes as Congress restarts negotiations on whether to extend a reduction in the Social Security payroll tax. Green power supporters see it as a potential legislative vehicle to continue the production tax credit.

Some GOP members have argued that the production tax credit is too costly as the government looks for ways to reduce the deficit. Critics also say that Congress should not be picking "winners and losers," and that renewable energy producers need to succeed or fail on their own. Wind advocates argue that lucrative incentives for fossil fuels have been on the books for decades.

California ranks third in the United States for total wind capacity, lagging behind Texas and Iowa, Bloomberg New Energy Finance said.

And while its wind capacity -- or potential to make wind energy -- is on the rise, the amount of wind power actually generated also puts California third in the nation behind Texas and Iowa, according to Bloomberg New Energy Finance data.

"You can have a whole bunch of capacity, but if the wind doesn't blow, you don't produce anything," said Charlie Blanchard with Bloomberg New Energy Finance.