



## **Emerging Minnesota renewable energy sector framework announced**

The next great industrial frontier for Minnesota could focus on renewable energy to broaden an emerging market reach globally. With that prospect in mind, a recently completed planning process identified the state's existing strengths and potential in green energy, and develop a framework for capital investments and research-to-commercialization to market a global energy sector.

The Minnesota Renewable Energy Proof of Concept Center planning grant team gathered insights from renewable energy stakeholders in higher education, business and government over 18 months. The planning team recently adopted a more-manageable working title of Renewable Energy Innovation Project (REIP) prior to announcing its conclusions.

"This extensive statewide outreach effort has put together a wide-ranging strategy designed to accelerate the pace of private sector innovation, business growth and job creation," said Cheryal Lee Hills, executive director of the central Minnesota's Region Five Development Commission (R5DC). "We learned that Minnesota already has tremendous innovative resources in renewable energy, but we'll need to pull together to reach our potential."

Utilizing a \$150,000 planning grant from the federal Economic Development Authority (EDA), Region Five and the Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development (DEED) were designated as lead agencies for the initiative. The University of Minnesota-Duluth Natural Resources Research Institute (UMD-NRRI) headed the research institution component. Business groups representing the state's solar industry and biomass companies, labor and the environment, and private renewable energy specialists also participated in the planning effort.

In submitting a final report, the REIP planning team concluded:

The urgent challenge for Minnesota today is how to accelerate the innovation and growth of its energy-related businesses in a highly-competitive and dynamic global market. We believe that such a plan should be grounded in the economic reality of limited public funding and maximize the benefits from investments by the private sector as well as targeted public investments. Minnesota should move quickly to develop a formal and detailed strategic plan of action for its energy sector (*an eight-point plan*).

Looking to the future, the Minnesota Renewable Energy Innovation Project (REIP) has proposed a new, limited initiative to be funded at \$7.5 million over three years or more. Funds will be sought from federal, state and private sources. Five primary REIP functions will focus on establishing an information clearinghouse, improve communications, provide metrics and measurement, set up a private sector engagement group, and provide assistance for grants and resource development.

The full REIP report, including a five-page executive summary, can be found at [www.resilientregion.org/economic-development](http://www.resilientregion.org/economic-development).

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The mission of Region Five Development Commission is to enhance the vitality and quality of life in Cass, Crow Wing, Morrison, Todd and Wadena counties. Region Five counties are recognized as a distressed region by EDA, eligible for priority economic development funding.

The Minnesota Department of Employment and Economic Development is the state's principal economic development agency. DEED programs promote business recruitment, expansion, and retention; international trade; workforce development; and community development.

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