

Energy engages participants at cross-border conference

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In the not-so-distant future, wind turbines may rise high, miles out along the Maine coast, while beneath the waves, turbines of a different sort churn with the currents, both helping to meet the state's ever-increasing thirst for energy. This vision of a state less reliant on fossil fuels was part of a two-day event held in the Bangor area aimed at promoting increased ties with Atlantic Canada, which shares geographic, economic, energy and cultural similarities, say organizers of the event.

"We have more in common with Atlantic Canada than we do Iowa or other states," says Tanya Pereira, deputy director of economic development for the city of Brewer.

Investments on either side of the border, whether it's Maine companies setting up shop in New Brunswick or vice versa, means benefits all around, from jobs to taxes and the economic spill-offs that come with them.

For proof, trade officials like Jeffrey Bennett, who heads up the Canada Desk and Bangor Regional Office of the Maine International Trade Center, point to New Brunswick-based Cooke Aquaculture, which reopened a shuttered processing plant in Machiasport last year and added about 100 jobs, or blueberry harvester Jasper Wyman & Son, which has operations in Prince Edward Island.

By far, Canada is Maine's largest international trading partner. Maine exports to Canada accounted for \$878 million in 2008 or roughly one out of every \$3 Maine did in international trade. In comparison, Maine imported \$2.3 billion from Canada in 2008, with 32,250 Maine jobs being supported by U.S. trade with Canada, according to the most recent information released by the Canadian government.

Maine exports to Atlantic Canada, consisting of Nova Scotia, New Brunswick, Prince Edward Island, Newfoundland and Labrador, accounted for more than 40% of the state's total exports to Canada in 2008.

"We feel from an economic development perspective, working together with Atlantic Canada with their strengths in energy, with their transportation -- the port of Halifax and its shipping

capabilities, for example -- we look at those things as regionally tremendous assets," Pereira says. "We would rather work with them as an entire area than compete with them."

Sponsored by the Bangor Region Development Alliance, Bangor Metro and Maine Ahead magazines, the Atlantica conference drew more than 100 people from both sides of the border. The cross-border program included an awards ceremony recognizing efforts that produce business initiatives, a political roundtable discussion and tours of innovative ventures. An energy-themed tour included stops at Old Town Fuel & Fiber, where biofuels are produced as a byproduct of the pulp-making process, and the University of Maine, where visitors saw how tidal power is being tested in miniature and how composites are being designed for use in bridges, high speed military boats and power production.

That tour attracted Tim Curry, president of Atlantica Centre for Energy, a nonprofit industry group based in Saint John, New Brunswick. Atlantica Centre's membership includes Pittsfield-based Cianbro Corp.

"Our interest is in energy in all its forms and how we can take advantage of opportunities in energy throughout the region," Curry said after a presentation about efforts by Ocean Renewable Power Co. to use tides along Maine's coast to power homes and businesses.

ORPC is looking to make Maine a national leader in tidal power. The company has successfully implemented a 60-kilowatt turbine off the coast of Eastport where the tides are considered among the best for generating power. And late next year the company expects that its pilot project will expand the number of turbines and generate enough electricity to power 1,500 homes, says John Ferland, ORPC's vice president of project development. There are long-term opportunities to develop 250 megawatts of power, enough to power more than 90,000 homes, according to information from ORPC.

"I was aware of the pilot project but this was new data for me, the nature of the trials," Curry says of the ORPC presentation. He added that a tidal test project in Nova Scotia by Nova Scotia Power -- which along with Bangor Hydro-Electric is a subsidiary of Halifax-based Emera Inc. -- has not been as successful after the turbine was damaged.

Ferland says his company has also been looking at Canada, where it has been in discussions for a year and a half with New Brunswick officials about developing tidal power. What Irving Oil Ltd's recent abrupt departure from its tidal research in the Bay of Fundy -- not far from where ORPC has been testing in Maine -- means remains largely unclear.

"It doesn't change anything for us, it just changes the players in New Brunswick," says Ferland