

Keeping the Lights On: People's Power & Light's Strategy for a Sustainable Future

Mairi McKellop

For the past ten years, People's Power & Light (PP&L) has been helping Rhode Island feel proud about its electricity, all while catalyzing some of the most impressive and ground-breaking renewable energy projects in the state. As Rhode Island's arm of the Energy Consumers Alliance of New England (ECANE), they not only help to provide their members with green energy and discount heating oil for their homes, but also serve as advocates for consumers and the environment. Through the development and implementation of various initiatives, People's Power & Light strives for a significant reduction in greenhouse gas emissions, energy savings for consumers, and the encouragement of varied and diverse renewable resources of energy in both Rhode Island and Massachusetts. PP&L believes in a two-pronged approach to sustainability, a combination of meeting the fuel needs of the present but also ensuring a secure energy future for our posterity. They encourage people from all walks of life to learn about energy, its environmental impacts, and what exactly can be done at the consumer level to promote conservation and the spread of green power in New England.

The organization strives to connect top-down policy with bottom-up community-based initiatives to bring sustainable energy savings to Rhode Islanders. They try to make their initiatives as replicable as possible and to expand the boundaries of traditional energy utility, consumer, and community relationships. PP&L works toward these goals through several programs, including *New England GreenStart*SM and *New England Wind*SM. These programs directly involve members in the development of renewable energy sources in New England.

New England GreenStart gives National Grid residential and small commercial electricity customers the opportunity to support cleaner, healthier electricity right on their regular utility bill. Through this program, the customer's electricity use is matched with local renewable energy sources, ensuring that the same amount of electricity also goes onto the grid as renewable energy on the customer's behalf. By supporting *New England GreenStart*, members increase the demand for renewable energy, as well as diminish the amount of fossil fuel energy that is used in the grid—in turn reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Members pay a small premium (about 2.4 cents per kilowatt hour extra), which appears directly on their National Grid utility bill and goes directly toward supporting local renewable energy resources. And—the contributions are federally tax-deductible!

New England GreenStart's portfolio boasts wind, solar, and small hydro generators that are

all located right in New England—creating jobs and reducing noxious emissions that cause respiratory illnesses in our local communities (see map below of the *New England GreenStart* resources).

People's Power & Light also will be offering a product that is 100% local wind power, called *New England Wind*. It will be available to customers of National Grid through their electric utility bill, at a premium of 3.8 cents per kilowatt hour (in addition to National Grid's Basic Service). Another part of the allure of *New England Wind* is that participation is not limited to National Grid electric customers only. Anyone, anywhere, will be able to support local wind power at www.ripower.org on a one-time or monthly basis. And just like *New England GreenStart*, contributions to *New England Wind* are federally tax deductible.

Because wind power is the most affordable zero-emission energy source available, PP&L has been focused on supporting community-scale wind projects that, because of their relatively small size, often struggle to contract with utilities. While PP&L encourages and supports larger-scale wind projects, its philosophy in supporting smaller projects has to do with how meaningful they are in their respective communities—bringing the vision and understanding of clean energy to community members, as well as the jobs, the affordability



Map displays sites where *New England GreenStart* and *New England Wind* members support local renewable energy. To view the full size map go to www.ripower.org. Photo: People's Power & Light.

of locally-produced energy, and the health benefits of lower emissions right to their homes.

In order to supply its products, People's Power & Light and its sister organization in Boston, Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance, have recently entered into several multi-year contracts with Massachusetts and Rhode Island wind projects. These projects include turbines at Berkshire East ski resort in Charlemont MA, Church Community Housing Corp. (Sandywoods Homes) in Tiverton R.I., St. Mary's Abbey in Wrentham MA, Lynn MA Water & Sewer, and Scituate Wind, LLC in MA. These will join wind projects already in People's Power & Light's portfolio such as Hull 1 in Hull MA (Hull Municipal Light Department), IBEW Local 103 in Dorchester MA, Town of Portsmouth R.I., Princeton MA Municipal Light Department, and Holy Name Catholic High School in Worcester MA.

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Go Deeper!

For more information about PP&L's programs, visit www.ripower.org or call 1-800-287-3950. To learn more about the Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance program visit www.massenergy.org.



The Town of Portsmouth Turbine is the largest in Rhode Island. *Photo: People's Power & Light.*

Portraits of some of the projects supported by People's Power & Light and Mass Energy:

Town of Portsmouth

At 1.5MW, the Town of Portsmouth Turbine is the largest in Rhode Island and is nestled in the hills directly behind Portsmouth High School. PP&L has been a contributor to the success of this project through the purchasing of green power, and has been greatly inspired by the commitment and dedication the Town of Portsmouth has shown to achieving a clean, sustainable energy future. Other groups will certainly be inspired to follow in their footsteps.

Sandywoods Farm Turbine (upcoming)

Sandywoods Farm in Tiverton, RI, is at the top of People's Power & Light's list of new projects under construction. Sandywoods Farm was developed by the Church Community Housing Corp. (nonprofit affordable housing developer), as a green, mixed-income housing development designed specifically as a community space for artists to reside.

St. Mary's Wind Turbine

In December 2010 St. Mary's Abbey, the first monastery of Cistercian nuns in the United States, installed a turbine on their grounds in Wrentham, Massachusetts. The monastery is well-known for its dedication to sustainable living, as well as the candy factory it runs on-site. The 100 kW turbine is a great representation of innovation and forward thinking. Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance, the sister organization to PP&L, helped make the turbine a success through *New England GreenStart*.



In 2009, the Princeton Municipal Light Department installed two 1.5 MW turbines. At that time, it was the largest wind power installation in Massachusetts. *Photo: Sam Feinsilver.*