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Western Governors' Association Goal of 30,000 Megawatts of Clean Energy By 2015

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Energy is on the front page of our nation's papers again. From high prices at the gas pump to bitter disputes over drilling in wilderness areas, Americans are examining their "addiction to oil."

Our national addiction to oil for transportation fuels is only the beginning. We are addicted to a fossil-fueled energy infrastructure for electric power generation that is becoming more expensive every year. The higher costs are reflected in our power bills, but also in communities around the region where the impacts of energy extraction activities are dividing friends and neighbors.

In 2004, Western Governors' Association (WGA) member governors, representing 12 of the nation's 20 windiest states, endorsed the goal of seeking 30,000 megawatts of clean energy throughout the West by 2015. Because of the West's rapid growth in power demand, this clean energy goal only represents a portion of the new electricity generation capacity expected to be added by 2015.

The WGA set up eight technology-specific task forces to examine how best to implement the clean energy goals. These task forces looked at every source of energy in the West and came up with comprehensive —and important— recommendations on achieving the clean energy goal.

Though all of the clean energy technologies studied by the WGA are important parts of the West's overall future energy portfolio, wind energy is perhaps the technology that is most capable of meeting the WGA goal in a rapid and cost-effective manner.

What do the WGA recommendations do for clean air, jobs or energy costs?

Economic Opportunities: wind energy provides new economic and employment opportunities for rural and agricultural communities.

In the community of Lamar, Colorado, for example, a new windfarm created over 350 construction jobs in this town of 8,800, along with at least 14 full-time permanent jobs. Many locals say that this project was a "Godsend" for the economic benefits it provided to the community.

Stable energy costs: once a wind energy project begins producing power, the cost is stable, predictable and affordable over the life of the contract: typically 15 to 25 years. This provides a critical and unparalleled cost hedge against volatile fossil fuel prices, protecting consumers, businesses and industry.

Domestic energy source: the 9,149 megawatts of our country's installed wind capacity is saving over half a billion cubic feet of natural gas per day...taking some of the natural gas price pressures off consumers while reducing energy imports from unstable or unfriendly parts of the world.

Energy security: fuel for wind electricity is not subject to price or transport disruptions. The clean energy goals are essential as our nation seeks to address rising costs of virtually all sources of energy.

Environmental certainty: wind energy generation creates no emissions of pollutants or greenhouse gases. This provides important certainty against possible future regulatory actions on carbon dioxide or any other emissions.

Saves water: Wind generates electricity without water. In contrast, fossil fuel and nuclear power plants use large amounts of water for cooling, competing with municipalities, farmers and consumers.

Better power grid: A healthy transmission grid ensures that the West can realize the benefits that wind energy promises. What is more, with access to transmission, wind energy projects can be built in a fraction of the time of coal-powered stations.

The WGA will meet in June, when governors will vote on these clean energy goals. The goals that were visionary in 2004 are a necessity now, and the West cannot afford to wait any longer. Wind energy can meet the governors' challenge, and wind energy works!