

# Green Power in the Northeast

By JANET MCGARRY

When our current presidential administration has close connections to the fossil fuels industry and little interest in climate change or other environmental issues, it is easy to feel discouraged whether America's policy towards renewable energy will ever change. Despite the gloomy situation in Washington, however, citizens in the Northeast now have reason to feel hopeful. Due to deregulation of electricity markets and creation of tradable renewable certificates, many of us in the Northeast can now choose electricity generated from renewables to power our homes.

According to the environmental think-tank World Watch Institute, electricity production in the U.S. is responsible for 66% of the country's emissions of sulfur dioxide and 33% of carbon dioxide, principal contributors to acid rain and global warming. Other byproducts of electricity production include mercury, nitrogen oxide, and nuclear waste.

Like most electricity generated in this country, the majority of electricity in the Northeast comes from power plants that use fossil fuels and nuclear energy. Until recently, residents of New England and the Mid-Atlantic states had little choice regarding how their electricity was generated unless they chose to install renewable energy systems on their homes. However, many citizens of Massachusetts, New Jersey, New York, Pennsylvania and Rhode Island now have the opportunity to purchase green electricity.

## Green-e Certification

The San Francisco based Center for Resource Solutions administers the Green-e Renewable Electricity Certification Program. Green-e certification establishes that the renewable electricity product meets environmental and consumer-protection standards. For example, the Green-e logo



reflects that at least 50% of an electrical product is generated from solar electric, wind, small, or certified low-impact hydro facilities, geothermal or biomass. In addition, the Green-e program requires electricity providers to disclose information about products in a standardized format so that customers can easily understand what they are purchasing. The Green-e program's website provides details about the program, data on specific fuel generation mix for each state, as well as general information about renewable energy ([www.green-e.org](http://www.green-e.org)).

## Tradable Renewable Certificates

Residents who live in areas where no company provides green electricity can still support renewable energy by pur-

chasing Tradable Renewable Certificates (TRCs or "green tags"). Green tags represent the environmental attributes, separate from the actual electricity produced, which are created when a renewable energy facility generates electricity. These certificates are sold separately by an organization other than the electricity provider which generated them. Thus, a person living in Boston can purchase green tags produced when a wind farm in Nebraska supplies electricity to a grid in the Midwest.

The environmental benefits of purchasing renewable electricity and green tags are essentially the same; in both cases, renewable energy displaces energy generated from non-renewable sources. However, there can be a difference regard-

ing the location where these environmental benefits are enjoyed. Since electricity generation impacts local air quality, a customer primarily concerned with improving his region's air quality will want to purchase green tags generated near his home. A customer concerned about global climate change should pay attention to the type of renewable energy used to generate the electricity: wind, solar PV, geothermal and small and low-impact hydro are ideal sources since they produce no emissions.

### **New England GreenStart in Massachusetts and Rhode Island**

New England GreenStart, part of the GreenUp program currently offered by two utilities in Massachusetts and Rhode

Island, provides customers with the opportunity to purchase electricity generated by renewable energy resources based in New England. New England GreenStart's clean electricity is generated by a mix of renewable energy sources including: small hydroelectric; a wind turbine in Hull, Massachusetts; solar installations in Massachusetts and Rhode Island; and biogas (Massachusetts Electric customers). Approximately 25% of this mix is from "new" renewable electricity generating facilities that began operation on or after January 1, 1998. This is an important fact since creation of new resources has a significant positive impact on changing the mix of electricity sources.

The non-profit Massachusetts Energy Consumers Alliance ("Mass Energy")

(www.massenergy.com, 800-287-3950) is the provider for New England GreenStart to Massachusetts Electric (National Grid) customers in Massachusetts. People's Power & Light, Rhode Island's non-profit energy consumers' alliance ("PP&L") is the provider for New England GreenStart to Narragansett Electric customers in Rhode Island. Once customers have enrolled, their charges for the program will be included on their regular monthly utility bills. Residential customers can purchase New England GreenStart to match either 100% or 50% of their electricity needs. The Mass Energy New England GreenStart 100% product costs 2.5 cents/kWh. Thus, an average household using 500 kWh a month would pay a monthly charge of \$12.50 for green

## **Providers of Renewable Energy and Tradable Renewable Certificates**

### **Providers of Renewable Energy**

#### **Massachusetts**

*Massachusetts Electric and Nantucket Electric customers:*

Community Energy, New Wind Energy, www.newwindenergy.com, 866-WIND-123  
Sterling Planet, www.sterlingplanet.com, 800-473-1335

GreenerWatts New England, www.greenerwattsnewengland.com, 800-689-7957

New England GreenStart, www.massenergy.com, 800-287-3950

#### **New Jersey**

*PSE&G, Conectiv and GPU Service territories:*

Green Mountain Energy, www.greenmountain.com, 800-286-5856

#### **New York**

*NIMO and NYSEG service territories:*

CommunityEnergy, New Wind Energy, www.newwindenergy.com, 866-WIND-123

*NIMO service territory:*

Green Mountain Energy, www.greenmountain.com, 866-716-9315

*Available through Agway in the NIMO and NYSEG service territories:*

Sterling Planet, www.sterlingplanet.com, 888-982-4929

*Con Edison, Orange and Rockland service territories:*

ConEdison Solutions, www.ConEdisonSolutions.com, 888-320-8991

#### **Pennsylvania**

*PECO service territory:*

Energy Cooperative, Eco Choice 100, www.theenergyco-op.com, 800-223-5783

*Duquesne, West Penn, Penn Electric, GPU Meded, PECO, Penn Power, PP&L and UGI service territories:*

Green Mountain Energy, www.greenmountain.com, 800-286-5856

#### **Rhode Island**

*Narragansett Electric customers:*

Community Energy, New Wind Energy, www.newwindenergy.com, 866-WIND-123  
Sterling Planet, www.sterlingplanet.com, 800-473-1335

GreenerWatts New England, www.greenerwattsnewengland.com, 800-689-7957

New England GreenStart, www.massenergy.com, 800-287-3950

### **Providers of Tradable Renewable Certificates/ Green Tags**

(List includes name of company followed by name of product)

#### **National**

CommunityEnergy, New Wind Energy, www.NewWindEnergy.com, 866-WIND-123  
Sterling Planet, Green America, www.sterlingplanet.com, 800-473-1335

Bonneville Environmental Foundation, Green Tags, www.GreentagsUSA.org, 866-233-8247

Renewable Choice Energy, American Wind, www.renewablechoice.com, 877-810-8670

3Phases Energy, Green Certificates, www.3phases.com, 415-346-7662

Chesapeake Wind Current, www.windcurrent.com, 410-484-5079

Mainstay Energy, www.mainstayenergy.com, 877-GREENTAG

#### **New England**

Sun Power Electric, ReGen, www.sunpower.org, 800-689-7957

electricity. The PP&L New England GreenStart 100% product costs 1.5 cents/kWh which for the average household would add only \$7.50 to the monthly electricity bill. Thus, the cost of green electricity is less than many people spend weekly on their personal energy source—gourmet coffee!

Nicole Wobus, program director of Green Energy Programs at Mass Energy, believes that increasing enrollment in the New England GreenStart program is “all about marketing and education.” She attributes the success of the Rhode Island program to a promotional campaign that included coordinated mailings, ads and publicity by a group of several organizations including the utility Narragansett Electric, People’s Power & Light and an environmental group. In addition to increasing enrollment of Massachusetts Electric customers in the New England GreenStart program, Mass Energy would like the utility NStar which services Bos-

ton and surrounding suburbs, the state’s most densely populated region, to offer a green electricity option. The nonprofit has collected pledge cards from NStar customers interested in purchasing green electricity for their homes in an effort to establish that there is a market for green electricity in the Boston area.

Erich Stephens, executive director of People’s Power & Light, has been pleased with the response that New England GreenStart has received: “Our enrollment numbers are right where we hoped they would be, maybe even better.” He has found that many Rhode Island residents are enthusiastic about finally having the option to power their homes with renewable energy rather than fossil fuels and have no objection to paying a little more for green electricity. A recent proposal to locate two liquefied gas projects in the city of Providence has motivated the city’s residents to reevaluate relying on even a clean fossil fuel. If the project is approved,

tankers will regularly enter the city’s harbor, raising concerns about safety as well as convenience since the city will close the harbor to accommodate the vessels.

Stephens expects that even more people will sign up for green electricity in the future: “My hunch is that there are thousands who have [New England GreenStart] brochures on their desks who haven’t gotten around to it yet.” He understands that making the phone call to sign up for the program isn’t a priority for people who are busy with hectic schedules. However, he mused that making the change takes only a few minutes. He recently distributed brochures describing the renewable energy product when he met some friends for a drink at a bar. Five minutes later, somebody handed Stephens a completed application; the eager applicant had used his cell phone to call his utility to confirm his account number in order to complete the application.

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