

# Construction begins on cooperative-owned wind project

By Daryl Hill



Construction crews started moving dirt on Oct. 5 for the cooperative's latest wind project in south-central South Dakota.

The last regulatory approval pending for construction of a large wind project in South Dakota was received Oct. 5. That's the same day a Record of Decision by the Rural Utilities Service (RUS) was published in the Federal Register. Construction started that day.

The \$363-million Crow Lake wind project will consist of 108 turbines located throughout Aurora, Brule and Jerauld Counties just east of Chamberlain in the south-central part of the state. A subsidiary of Basin Electric, PrairieWinds SD 1 Inc., will own and operate 101 turbines; the other seven turbines will be owned by South Dakota Wind Partners (SDWP). A press conference was held in Brandon, SD, on Oct. 21 to recognize the start of construction and to acknowledge East River Electric Power Cooperative of Madison, SD, and SDWP for their contributions to the project.

PrairieWinds will construct and operate the turbines for SDWP. Through PrairieWinds, Basin Electric will purchase their output. SDWP announced in late September they had raised the required funding from South Dakota investors for their part of the project.

When completed in early 2011, the PrairieWinds project will have 101 turbines with a generating capacity of 151.5 megawatts, the SDWP project will have seven turbines with a capacity of 10.5 megawatts. The Crow Lake project will be the largest wind project in the United States owned solely by a cooperative.

"We've come a long way since we started this project more than three years ago," Project Manager Ron Rebenitsch says. "These are

the fourth and fifth wind projects involving Basin Electric in South Dakota since early 2002."

Rebenitsch expresses appreciation for help and support from East River Electric. "It's important to have this grassroots support in completing a project of this complexity," he says.

Amanda Wangler, project engineer, says equipment was in place to begin construction as soon as the record of decision was published. "The first phase of construction is primarily civil and includes building roads, foundations and crane walks. This work will basically progress from the south to the north. Construction of the collector system is also under way. This phase will progress in a north to south direction," she says.

Wangler says the construction of the project will involve a work force of more than two hundred and truck and heavy equipment traffic will increase in the area as construction progresses.

In 2001, Basin Electric began developing its first wind project – two turbines north of Chamberlain, followed by another two turbines south of Minot, ND. Since then Basin Electric has developed more than 450 megawatts of wind power (including projects with NextEra Energy Resources) in the Dakotas.

"In 2009, we completed the largest wind project in North Dakota, that is owned by another Basin Electric subsidiary, PrairieWinds ND 1, located south of Minot," Rebenitsch says. "That project has a capacity of 120 megawatts. When this project is completed in South Dakota, we'll have more than 700 megawatts of wind generation in our portfolio."