

Local Energy & Montana Jobs

Net Metering: Fair Credit for Clean Energy

Broadly distributed around Montana are more than 1,000 solar arrays, small wind turbines and micro hydro projects that provide power to homes, businesses, schools, farms and ranches. When the wind is blowing or the sun is shining and these generators produce more energy than the owner is using, the extra electrons flow onto the power grid and are sold by the utility to neighboring customers. Montana law guarantees that renewable energy system owners get full credit on their power bill for each kilowatt-hour of clean energy they provide to the utility. **That's fair. Let's keep it that way.**

Why are Utilities Putting up Barriers to Rooftop Solar?

Renewable energy is helping Montana families and businesses take charge of their energy costs like never before. The wholesale cost of solar panels has dropped by two-thirds since 2008, and production from net-metered energy systems in Montana has nearly tripled in that time. However, monopoly utilities have historically made money by building big power plants and transmission lines and some see rooftop solar as unwelcome competition and a threat to their bottom line. In response, utilities around the country are lobbying hard to curb rooftop solar and small wind with new fees, taxes and rate hikes that dismantle the fair deal we have with net metering. **Don't let Montana utilities take away our clean energy options.**

Energy Savings, Consumer Protections

Studies in Texas, Minnesota, California, Vermont and Nevada demonstrate that on-site solar energy provides a net benefit to utility customers, including customers that don't own solar panels. That's because solar power comes online at times of high demand when power from other sources is most expensive. Plus, on-site renewables deliver energy without inefficient transmission line losses and costly pollution controls. These investments keep our energy dollars close to home and put engineers, electricians, roofers, and renewable energy installers to work. **Local energy works for Montanans.**

Photo Credit: Solar Montana, Helena



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Let's Move Renewable Energy Forward

Make Renewable Energy Affordable and Accessible for All

Allow neighborhood net metering:

Several states have passed laws that allow individual utility customers to buy into a local solar array or wind turbine. Subscribers receive a credit on their power bill according to how much of the project they own, and how much energy it produces each month. This way a customer can get the benefits of renewable energy even if they're a renter or don't have an ideal site for solar panels or a wind turbine on their own property.

Stop the credit giveaway: Under current law a net-metered customer must sacrifice any unused net metering credits to the utility at the end of a 12-month billing cycle. The customer receives no compensation for the extra energy they've given to the utility. As a matter of fairness, customers should be able to keep those credits indefinitely.

Remove Barriers to Renewable Energy Development

Lift the cap: Montana law caps the size of a NorthWestern Energy customer's net-metered solar array, wind turbine or micro-hydro generator at 50 kilowatts (kW). That's big enough for a home or small business, but it's too small to allow a large farm, manufacturing facility, hospital or school to meet their energy needs with on-site clean energy. Most rural electric co-ops have even lower caps. Thirty-seven states allow net-metered systems larger than 50 kW, enabling businesses and institutions to secure greater energy savings.

Multiple meters, multiple savings: A farm, university or multi-unit housing project with multiple electric meters on the same or adjacent property should be able to run all those meters with the energy from one solar array or wind turbine. This simple fix would streamline on-site renewable energy projects and cut costs.



Photo Credit: Moodle Wind, Great Falls

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