



Annual Report 2021

Montana Renewable Energy Association



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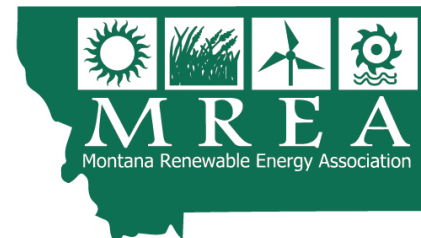
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Dear MREA Members and Supporters,

Another year is in the books and it was one in which the Montana Renewable Energy Association made great strides, both inside and outside the organization. It began with MREA establishing a strong presence at the legislative session, where for the first time in years we advanced a pro-rooftop solar bill that would have helped schools and libraries save money and helped create jobs. While this legislation ultimately did not pass – as we had to once again defend our work against those who are threatened by expanding access to renewable energy – we are proud of our efforts and the momentum we built. Executing on the three-year plan we laid out, we added staff and expanded our capacity to serve the interest of renewable energy here in Montana and the will of our passionate membership.

A highlight of the year was the opportunity to reconvene our beloved Montana Clean Energy Fair and to gather our community to celebrate the work we do. In addition, we traveled to 10 rural communities to educate Montanans on the benefits of rooftop solar, and held clean energy expos in Missoula and Helena. These events, alongside the 10 additional unique educational events we hosted online, have helped us achieve an almost 50% increase in membership since 2018.

These educational and informational events that help Montanans understand the value of renewable energy would not have been possible without the continued investments we make in our staff capacity. The collaborative work of our Program Coordinator and Executive Director has demonstrated how effective our organization can be with additional expertise and hands-on support. We are able to focus more resources on the vital work of developing and advancing programs and policies that support the growth of renewable energy, and are even more efficient and effective in accomplishing our goals.

The future has never been brighter for MREA and we are excited to continue our work in 2022. With interest in renewable energy growing exponentially, and with more people calling the Last Best Place home, now more than ever we need to strengthen MREA. We will continue to speak up for our members and our industry here in Montana. We have made great strides in this effort, but there is still a long way to go. With your continued support, we can continue to serve our mission and together we can make 2022 the best year yet.

My best to you,

Brad Van Wert, *President (2022)*



► Organization Updates

Growing Our Capacity and Impact

We are continuing through a multiyear plan to strategically grow and diversify our organization to retain our core competencies of providing technical expertise, a credible industry voice, and reliable teamwork to partnerships. This year, we not only restarted many of the activities and programs we had put on hold in 2020, but we also pushed ahead with our new Montana Rural Solar Access Project. The success of these programs were made possible by the investments we made in our staffing. With that additional capacity, MREA was able to expand our engagement efforts to 10 new communities across rural Montana, connecting with over 25 different businesses, organizations, and local governments. Growing our staff capacity, and expanding our engagement across the broad geographic range of Montana, are each components of how we aim to advance our mission by 1) enhancing our impact across the diverse economic, social, and political landscape of our state, and by 2) ensuring our work aligns with our vision, values, and goal of ensuring renewable energy is more accessible to Montanans across social, economic, and political spectrums.

*Our **mission** is to foster the growth of renewable energy for all Montanans through education, advocacy, and industry engagement.*

Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion

MREA continues working to diversify our membership, board leadership, and program offerings. We know that by pursuing these changes we can enhance our impact across the state and more effectively pursue our vision. That is because while we diversify, we are also focusing on how our programs support all Montanans in accessing and benefiting from renewable energy development. We recognize that if all Montanans cannot equitably participate in, and contribute toward, renewable energy development across our state, we cannot accomplish our vision. With that in mind, MREA has worked over the course of 2021 to examine how we can integrate this knowledge throughout every aspect of our work, from our strategic goals and objectives to our daily operations. This is an on-going process as we explore how to most effectively advance a renewable energy future for us all.

*Our **vision** is a Montana where the widespread use of renewable energy drives Montana's economy and powers every aspect of Montanans' lives.*

► 2021 Programming Highlights

Legislative Advocacy: 2021 Legislative Session

The 2021 Legislative Session was challenging, to say the least. Rooftop solar and small-scale renewables emerged from the session mostly intact, but not without their share of losses. As of the 2022 tax year, the Alternative Energy Systems Tax Credit will no longer be available to help Montanans invest in energy- and cost-saving technologies. We also lost the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS), first established in 2005. Montana should have followed the lead of other states by increasing the RPS goals, but instead, the Legislature repealed the policy altogether. One major victory from the session was defeating HB359 (Rep. Brewster) which was an attempt by Northwestern Energy to overturn the PSC's ruling on rooftop solar credits and upend Montana's solar market. The outpouring of opposition to this bill was an inspiring demonstration of what our community can do with a unified voice!

A bittersweet victory was the fate of House Bill 448 (Rep. Kassmier), a bill designed and written by MREA, which would have increased the size limit for rooftop solar systems in Montana. Yet again, Northwestern Energy led the charge to sabotage the intent of this bill with language that would have harmed solar customers and professionals. MREA worked with our allies and the bill sponsor to defeat the hijacked version at the 11th hour of the session. Despite its ultimate demise, the bill initially earned significant bipartisan support along the way and made it further than any rooftop solar or net metering bill has in years. This gives us hope for what the future holds, especially because we know that momentum is on our side. However, we also know there is a lot of work still to be done to build a deeper understanding of these issues at the legislature. MREA is a leading voice for renewable energy education and advocacy in the state, and we look forward to continuing that work with our eyes on 2022 elections and the 2023 session.

Education & Outreach: Clean Energy Expos

This year we were excited to re-engage our partners to co-present the Helena Sun Run and Clean Energy Expo, and continue our participation in the Missoula Climate and Clean Energy Expo. These events are excellent opportunities to share resources and connect with households, businesses, and other organizations around creating our clean energy future. In Helena, we partnered again with the Sleeping Giants Citizens Council and Helena Vigilante Runners for the event, which enjoyed an impressive attendance. We were joined by seven organizations and businesses advancing renewable energy, and held two presentations on storage and electric vehicles. In Missoula, we were pleased to partner again with Climate Smart Missoula and join more than 20 businesses and organizations in sharing our information and resources. MREA and other renewable energy advocates presented throughout the day on topics like how to go solar and how to pair solar with batteries and electric vehicles, with consistently high attendance.

Education & Outreach: Montana Rural Solar Access Project

MREA launched the Montana Rural Solar Access Project (MRSAP) with the goal of ensuring that our rural communities across the state have access to the independence, cost savings, and resiliency that distributed solar can offer. We started the project by studying the challenges other communities have faced to increasing access to solar development in rural areas. In 2021, we launched Phase Two to 'ground truth' this research here at home. We traveled to 10 communities and connected with over 25 businesses and organizations to learn about how we can support rural Montanans in accessing distributed solar development, and to discuss the benefits renewable energy offers. What we learned through this outreach was monumental. We not only identified challenges that need overcoming, but we also heard the diversity of reasons that rural communities across our state want access to renewable energy. We outlined our key findings in our Phase Two Report and concluded the year with strategic planning for how we intend to bring this knowledge into action in 2022 and beyond.

Montana Clean Energy Fair

10th Annual Fair - August 14th - Butte, MT

Thank you to the City of Butte and to all of the sponsors, volunteers, and attendees that made this year's Fair a success!

Clean & Green Sponsors

Clearwater Credit Union

Gold Level Sponsors

Blue Cross Blue Shield MT

Bozeman Green Build

Coffman Engineers

Forward Montana Foundation

National Center for Appropriate Technology

Staacks Motorsport

Silver Level Sponsors

Alternative Energy Resources Organization

Balance Engineering

CED Greentech - Bozeman

Harvest Solar

Montana Energy Office/DEQ

OnSite Energy

Sundance Solar Systems

Turner Foundation

10:00 am
EXHBT BLD 2
10:00 am
EXHBT BLD 3

water heating systems. This session will cover how to determine what makes most sense in your home or business.

Smart Solar Shopping Ben Brouwer, Montana Energy Office, Department of Environmental Quality. Learn how to set appropriate solar goals for your home and business. How do I even begin if I'm thinking about buying solar electricity to offset my power bill? Learn how to set appropriate solar goals for your home and business, and review solar bids. This session is a must for anyone who's interested in the exciting market of solar energy.

11:00 am
EXHBT BLD 3

Large-scale Renewables and Utility Planning Brian Fadie, Montana Environmental Information Center; Mark Reller, Bonneville Power Administration. Montana has tremendous wind and solar resources, which are being harnessed by large scale wind and solar projects across the state. Recently, the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) on the Montana Renewable Development Action Plan to explore the opportunities and barriers of renewable energy. Join our experts to learn what's on the horizon for large-scale wind and solar development in the state.

12:00 pm
EXHBT BLD 2

Financing and Incentives for your Renewable Energy Ben Brouwer, Montana Energy Office, Department of Environmental Quality; Paul Herendeen, Missoula Federal Credit Union. There's no such thing as a free lunch, but there are incentives, tax credits, low interest loans, and other programs that can help you finance your renewable energy. Incentives will work for you, and see how your investment will net returns.

12:00 pm
EXHBT BLD 3

Electric Vehicles Show-and-Tell Kyla Maki, Montana Department of Environmental Quality. Get the low-down on electric cars and what they have to offer you and your community. In addition to going over technology options and charging options, this session will also feature a hands-on show and tell from the electric car show is a truly unique event for Montanans!

1:00 pm
EXHBT BLD 2

Off-Grid Living Henry Dykema, Sundance Solar Systems. Trying to power an RV, cabin or a remote home? Or just wanting to be more self-sufficient? Learn the basics of off-grid technologies, such as solar, wind, and hear first-hand what it takes to cut the power cord.

1:00 pm
EXHBT BLD 3

Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency in the Bozeman Community Natalie Meyer, City of Bozeman. The City of Bozeman is experiencing large development and not just in population growth. From the city to the university, to schools and churches, we are working to increase solar adoption and energy efficiency programs in order to save money, decrease harmful emissions, and make the Bozeman community more sustainable. Past, present, and future projects, including an important update to Bozeman's Climate Action Plan.

2:00 pm
EXHBT BLD 2

Renewable Energy Policy & Regulation Brian Fadie, Montana Environmental Information Center; Cody Ferguson, Montana Public Service Commission. In 2017 Montana experienced a lot of change in its energy policy. From our latest legislative session to the Montana Public Service Commission's recent decision to allow solar to be used in the middle of the state, we have seen a lot of change. Join this session to get all the latest news on renewable energy policy and regulation.

2:00 pm
EXHBT BLD 3

Best Practices for Net-Zero Homes Susan Bilo, Green Compass Sustainability Consulting; Barbara Miller, National Affordable Housing Network. What would it be like to live in a house where your net energy use - not just your energy bill - was zero? Learn what a Net Zero Energy (NZE) home is and how it works. Discover how the practices were implemented for the Mountain Horizon's (MHA) solar subdivision in Whitehall, Montana. We offer the Fair for a field trip and tour to a nearly net zero energy home!

3:00 - 3:20

Raffle Drawings After we get our raffle tickets, we'll have a drawing for a true Net Zero Energy (NZE) building just down the road. The prize is a 100% solar powered house with a super insulated, solar hot water and water heating system, EV car charging, and much more. Visit the details at the MREA booth at the Fair or during our Best Practices for Net-Zero Homes workshop.

4:00 - 5:00

Solar Subdivision Visit a true Net Zero Energy (NZE) building just down the road. The prize is a 100% solar powered house with a super insulated, solar hot water and water heating system, EV car charging, and much more. Visit the details at the MREA booth at the Fair or during our Best Practices for Net-Zero Homes workshop.

500

Individual
Attendees

7

Electric Vehicles
Displayed

10

Educational
Workshops

15

Informational
Booths



► 2021 Upcoming Priorities

Legislative Advocacy: Preparing for the 2023 Legislative Session

The 2021 session revealed deeply entrenched opposition to solar and renewables in our legislature. And yet, we know that momentum is on our side. We also know there is a lot of work still to be done. We must ensure that legislators are hearing from all of the stakeholders affected by their decisions, including the Montanans who support renewable energy technologies and the professionals who install them. As we look ahead toward our preparation for the 2023 session, we are excited to draw on what we have learned through our Montana Rural Solar Access Project to refine our advocacy goals and strategies. MREA is a leading voice for renewable energy education and advocacy in the state, and in 2022 we will continue the research, coalition building, and strategizing that enables us to do that work and progress toward our vision of a renewable energy future.

Education & Outreach: Montana Clean Energy Fair and Clean Energy Expos

Our Annual Clean Energy Fair and Clean Energy Expos continue to be exciting opportunities to connect renewable energy businesses, organizations, and everyday Montanans around renewable energy development. As we look ahead, we are eager to continue these efforts and strengthen the partnerships and connections that are critical to growing our community and advancing our mission. We hope to see you at an Expo, or at our Fair on August 13th, 2022, in Butte, America.

Education & Outreach: Connecting with Communities

As part of our commitment to engage with communities across the diverse geographic range of Montana, we continue to plan education and outreach events in new parts of our state and build upon the new connections we forge. These events take the form of presentations to students of various ages, Pint Nights, and SolarEase presentations in which we share the basics of how households, businesses, and farmers/ranchers can develop renewable energy on their properties and get the most out of the cost savings, independence, and resiliency these systems offer.

Education & Outreach: Exploring Energy

An educational program on the agenda for 2022 that we are especially excited about is our monthly webinar series *Exploring Energy*. This engagement opportunity will provide our MREA community and beyond with brief, lunchtime presentations on the latest buzz around renewable energy technology, development, and applications. Each month, renewable energy experts and professionals will join us to share their insights and perspectives in an easy to digest format. Recordings of these presentations are shared on our YouTube channel to help ensure they are available to any and all Montanans interested in learning about renewable energy.

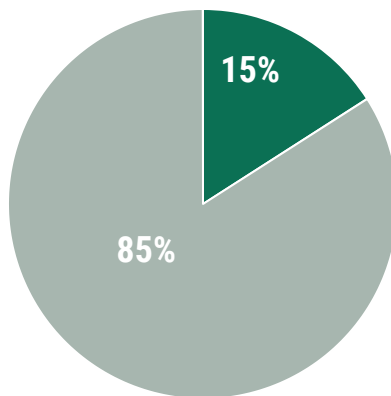
Education & Outreach: Enhancing our Educational Resources

Our Montana Rural Solar Access Project has empowered us to improve, and expand upon, our educational resources to meet the interests and needs of communities across the state. In the coming year, we have plans to grow and revise the educational resources on our MREA website and expand the educational topics we cover in our informational handouts. Through these revisions, we aim to speak to the concerns and questions we heard from communities, and make sure those interested in developing renewable energy have the information they need to move forward. We plan to utilize the network of connections we have built and strengthened over the years to ensure these resources reach our rural and urban communities alike.

► 2021 Financials

As we continued through the lingering health crisis and economic turbulence of 2021, we were able to recommence many of the activities we had to put on pause in 2020. Our Fair and Expos were a particularly welcome opportunity to reconnect with our statewide community. As part of our Montana Rural Solar Access Project, we were also able to make new connections with communities by holding meetings on accessing solar in 10 cities and towns across the state. MREA grew its staff capacity in 2021 to achieve this statewide engagement. While new revenues fell short of covering this additional expenditure, growing our staff capacity is an investment to support expanding our programming and our impact in the long-term. During this pivotal time of growth for our organization, we at MREA are especially grateful for the generosity of our community, which helped us reach, and surpass, our most ambitious EOY fundraising goal yet.

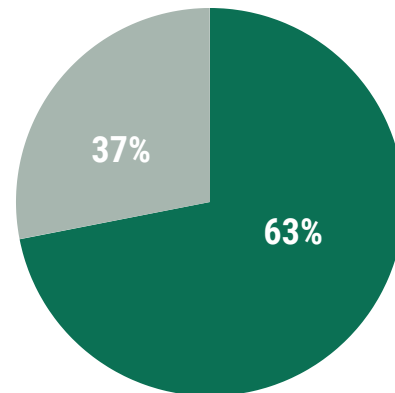
REVENUE



- Program Services Revenue \$16,799
- Contributions & Grants \$88,546

Total Revenue: \$105,345

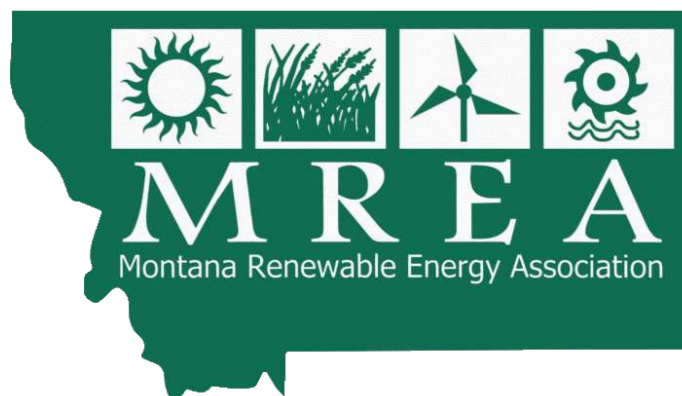
EXPENSES



- Program Services \$85,511
- Administrative Services \$33,370

Total Expenses: \$118,881

Thank you to our community of renewable energy professionals, advocates, and enthusiasts for all the ways you engage with MREA to move our mission forward. We couldn't do it without you, and we wouldn't want to.



Learn more about our community and our work at
MontanaRenewables.org

Montana Renewable Energy Association

PO Box 673

Missoula, MT 59806

(406) 214-9405

Info@MontanaRenewables.org