

MAINE INTERFAITH POWER & LIGHT

Spreading the Light by Doing the Right Thing

PROJECT SNAPSHOT

PROJECT

MIPL will serve as an aggregator for both residential and non-residential customers interested in purchasing electricity generated solely by renewable resources.

TECHNOLOGY

Green energy (e.g., solar, wind, hydro, biomass)

ESTIMATED CO₂ EMISSION REDUCTIONS

For every 500 homes, 2,700 tons of CO₂ may be avoided annually.

INVESTMENT

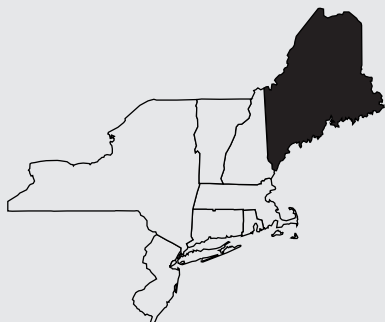
Over \$80,000

LESSONS LEARNED

To succeed, buying cooperatives like MIPL must move beyond the environmental community and help ordinary Americans better understand the environmental impacts of electricity production. This will require much legwork on the part of volunteers and MIPL staffers.

FUNDING SOURCES

Maine Council of Churches; Episcopal Diocese of Maine's Spirituality and Environment Committee; the Episcopal Province of New England's Justice, Peace and the Integrity of Creation Team; and over the next two years, the Beldon Foundation.



INTRODUCTION

Many environmental and social writers consider climate change to be the most compelling moral issue of the new millennium. Thus it comes as no surprise that the environmental and social impacts of climate change are becoming more widely and forcefully integrated into the stewardship imperatives of many faith-based organizations. In Maine, the Maine Council of Churches (MCC) and its members created Maine Interfaith Power & Light (MIPL) to directly address this aspect of stewardship by working with Maine's faith communities to purchase "green" power for churches and homes.¹

THE PROJECT

MIPL will serve as an aggregator for both residential and non-residential customers interested in purchasing electricity generated by renewable resources like solar, wind and hydroelectric power, and landfill gas and biomass. Aggregation is attractive to green power suppliers because it avoids customer acquisition costs that can range from \$60-\$300 per account. Participation will be offered statewide to churches, congregations and religious orders, as well as to their members, and to affiliated facilities, among others. After creating a participant pool and obtaining an aggregator's license from state regulators, MIPL will work to line up green electricity suppliers, both within and outside of Maine.

Using what is known as the "call around" approach, MIPL will negotiate contracts on behalf of its members by soliciting responses from potential suppliers. Product, pricing and terms from the chosen supplier or suppliers – who must be licensed in Maine – will be offered by MIPL to all participants in its pool. MIPL will aggregate customers, and furnish education and enrollment services. All other service and support will be provided by the electricity supplier.

Thus far, 400 homes and 77 churches have indicated a willingness to purchase green power at a premium price through

MIPL. But because willingness does not always translate into commitment, it remains difficult to project exactly how many will do so. Unpredictable increases in electricity prices could affect the number who sign up. Other variables include the size of the price premium, and the range of green power choices that MIPL can offer. A bigger program could mean a lower premium and more choices, but that presents a chicken-and-egg problem. Despite these uncertainties, however, MIPL hopes to sign contracts for 20 megawatts (MW) of green power, encourage development of a green power market in Maine and remain viable after initial grant funding has been spent. To do this, MIPL is working to bring 2,500 to 3,000 electricity accounts into the program in the near term. Ultimately, it hopes to enlist 20,000 homes and 400 religious institutions in the effort. To do so would mean involving half of the state's 800 "main line" churches, and 20 percent of their member families. MIPL is developing an outreach and education program to help it accomplish this goal. It plans to train volunteers to spread the word about green energy and collective buying power all across Maine. Their training will focus on six areas: the current climate crisis, the faith community's role in addressing this crisis, existing alternatives, electricity choice and green power, what MIPL is doing about it, and how individuals can get involved. As Thomas Ewell, Executive Director of the Maine Council of Churches, explains, "Maine Interfaith Power & Light gives people of faith an opportunity to act collectively and cooperatively. Together we can raise one voice on behalf of the planet with the strength of an economic movement, motivated by a moral vision."

PROJECTED RESULTS

The CO₂ emission reductions associated with MIPL's initiative will depend on the number and size of households and churches that ultimately participate. Estimates indicate that for every 500 homes to sign up, 2,700 tons of CO₂ will be reduced each year. This is the equiva-

TABLE I
PROJECTED IMPACT OF MIPL AGGREGATION

NUMBER OF HOMES INCLUDED	ENERGY USE kWh/YEAR	ESTIMATED CO ₂ REDUCTIONS (TONS/YEAR)
500	3,600,000	2,736
2,000	14,400,000	10,944
3,000	21,600,000	16,416
10,000	72,000,000	54,720
20,000	144,000,000	109,440

lent of deciding not to consume 14 barrels of oil a day, or taking 380 typical cars off the road each year. MIPL's interim goal would cut CO₂ by 11,000-16,400 tons a year. This increases to more than 110,000 tons with its longer-range goal of signing up 20,000 households and 400 churches.² Table 1 above estimates the range of CO₂ reduction, based on varying demand for green power.

LESSONS LEARNED

Significant barriers confront aggregators who, like MIPL, seek to enter newly deregulated electricity markets. First, there is the knowledge barrier. The concept of an electricity-purchasing group is new to most people. Considerable education will be needed to overcome the tendency to stick with what is familiar. A concerted educational effort among MIPL, electricity suppliers and environmental advocates will be needed to educate the public about the environmental implications of conventional electric generation, and the value of green power. MIPL has been working to find volunteers to carry these messages into their communities.

Second, organizational barriers exist. MIPL is bringing together groups that think and work in very different ways – the faith-based community, competitive power suppliers, various professionals like lawyers, the insurance industry and regulators, just to name a few. Finally, deregulation in Maine remains in its infancy, and its future structure is difficult to predict with certainty.

FUTURE COMMITMENTS

MIPL expects to start soliciting supplier interest in early 2001. Meanwhile, through its outreach campaign, it hopes to accomplish three things:

- Build a cadre of MIPL volunteers in each parish (its “missionaries”) to carry the message to congregations and beyond through letters, personal contacts and formal presentations.
- Introduce MIPL to the wider community through local programs sponsored by Maine’s regional interfaith councils.
- Make at least one contact with every church or faith organization in Maine, with a key objective being to ensure that those in charge of finances and mission receive copies of MIPL’s educational and program materials.

ORGANIZATIONAL PROFILE

MIPL held an initial organizational meeting in December 1999 and became a Maine corporation the following April. While still in the formative stages, it is operating under the administrative umbrella of the Maine Council of Churches. Its goals and organizational structure are modeled on Episcopal Power and Light. EP&L is a San

Francisco-based group that, since 1998, has been serving as an aggregator by purchasing green power for congregations. By the summer of 2000, 61 churches in California had opted to buy green power from EP&L’s supplier, Green Mountain Energy, through the latter’s Wind for the Future Program. GME promises to make a cash payment to each church that signs up, or to perform a free energy audit of its buildings. In addition, GME donates \$35 to the church for each parishioner who joins the program. When 3,800 parishioners have enrolled, GME will build a new wind turbine. EP&L is helping other entities across the country – including MIPL – implement its approach to establishing faith-based, green-power buying collaboratives. Another group, Partners for Environmental Quality, is sponsoring a similar program in New Jersey.

Since its initial meeting, Maine Interfaith Power & Light has been committed to an interfaith approach that focuses on environmental stewardship. Its mission statement, adopted in January 2000, reinforces this: “It is for the preservation of God’s creation that we gather together to purchase electric power that has the least possible adverse effect on this fragile earth, our island home.”

CONTACTS

MIPL’s brochure and its Letter of Intent are available on the MCC website www.maineCouncilofchurches.org.

By signing the Letter of Intent, churches and individuals indicate their willingness to purchase green power.

CLEAN AIR-COOL PLANET CASE STUDY RATING

For every 500 homes that sign on to buy green power it is estimated CO₂ emissions reductions will be equivalent to the following:

Avoiding the consumption of 14 barrels of oil per day.



OR Taking 380 vehicles off the road per year. (1 car = 20 vehicles)



Assumptions: 1,093 lbs of CO₂ per barrel of oil. Vehicles are average passenger cars (approximately 20 lbs CO₂ per gallon of gasoline - 22.5 miles per gallon, averaging 16,000 miles per year)

Episcopal Power & Light

www.theregenerationproject.org/html/indexxx.htm

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¹ Because it is derived from renewable resources, green electricity generates little or no greenhouse gases or other types of air pollution. Green resources include solar energy (for example, photovoltaics), wind, sustainable biomass, geothermal energy and hydropower, among others.

² All electricity related emission reductions cited here are based on New England Regional marginal emission rates, provided by ISO New England. See Appendix A for a discussion of these calculations. CO₂ reductions were estimated based on the assumption that average household/church demand per year equals 7,200 kWh.