



Editorials

Renewable Rhode Island

01:00 AM EDT on Saturday, September 16, 2006

New England, though lacking fossil fuels, does have indigenous sources of energy -- chiefly wind, solar power, and water (rivers and tides), whose potential has been largely wasted.

Thus, Governor Carcieri's announcement of an initiative to develop several hydro-electric generators on rivers is heartening. The proximate cause of the announcement was that the Rhode Island Construction Service, of Johnston, is converting the 156-year-old Harris Mill, on the Pawtuxet River in Coventry, into an apartment-and-condominium complex. The firm plans to install a water turbine to generate hydro-electric power, and make additional electricity from the excess steam from the complex's heating system, using bio-fuel. The state will lend the firm \$500,000, from the Renewable Energy Fund. Particularly because this installation could become an important demonstration project, the state loan seems a good public investment.

Even more intriguing is the idea of a hydro-electric station at the former American Tourister factory, in Warren. Andrew Dzykewicz, the governor's chief energy adviser, says that a study will determine whether a turbine on the Palmer River could generate electricity from the tides.

Meanwhile, the state has hired Applied Technology & Management, of Newport, to recommend onshore and offshore sites for wind turbines -- a vastly underused source of energy for electricity generation, especially in coastal areas. The firm's David Mendelsohn says that the governor's goal of producing 15 percent of Rhode Island's electrical power from wind by 2016 is "probably" achievable.

Who knows?

But what's clear is that New England is far behind where it should be in renewable energy. It needs to get going fast, for environmental and economic reasons. Happily, both Rhode Island's governor and lieutenant governor, Charles Fogarty -- Mr. Carcieri's Democratic opponent for the governorship -- seem to recognize this need.