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**ENERGY****Businesses discuss opportunities in wind power****By Christopher Cousins**
BDN Staff

PORTLAND, Maine — The key to success for Maine’s budding wind power industry might be ensuring that as much of the industry as possible is home-grown.

The delicate cost-benefit equation of ultra-expensive upfront construction costs must be balanced by revenue in the form of megawatts of electricity trickling from turbines to homes across New England and elsewhere. To tip the scales toward success, one strategy is to build the machinery and equipment — tower parts, turbine blades, durable housing for the generators — as close as possible to the wind farms.

The problem is Maine is not known as a major producer of wind power components, though a concerted effort is under way to change that.

“We absolutely have to do this together or we won’t succeed,” said Matt Kearns, vice president for business development in New England for First Wind, a firm already heavily involved in onshore wind projects in Maine and other states. “We have an incredibly strong network of Maine businesses that know how to do wind power. This relationship with Maine businesses is real. It’s palpable. It’s here in this conference room.”

Kearns’ remarks came during the first installment of a three-day conference involving several dozen small-business owners, government officials and experts in fields ranging from geology to carbon fiber composites. The Maine Wind Seminar Series 2010, which is taking place at the Clarion Hotel in Portland, ends Thursday. With onshore wind farms already operating and under construction in Maine and millions of dollars of grant funds streaming into the state for the exploration of deep-water turbines in the Gulf of Maine, the state is poised to increase its wind power efforts exponentially.

Sen. Susan Collins, R-Maine, provided the keynote address during Tuesday’s program. Collins, in addition to helping bring some \$25 million in federal funds to Maine for the research of deep-water wind in the past year, is also the sponsor of a bill before Congress that would create a 10-year plan in the Department of Energy to ensure that wind power receives sustained support.

“Maine has top-flight scientists, technicians, engineers and manufacturing capabilities to tap into this powerful source of clean, renewable and affordable energy,” said Collins. “The challenges that lie ahead are great, but working together, I know we can meet them.”

With myriad businesses possessing expertise on various aspects of the project from research to construction, the challenge is aligning them into an efficient, cohesive group. Some businesses, such as boat builders, are looking to take their operations in a new direction. Of the approximately 170 participants in this week's conference, there were at least 24 people representing boat builders. Matthew Maddox, vice president of finance for the Washburn and Doughty Shipyard in East Boothbay, said his firm doesn't necessarily want to build composite blades or tower parts, but might be of use in providing service vessels for the construction and maintenance of offshore wind farms.

Stephen Van Vogt, executive director of the Maine Composites Alliance, who helped organize this week's conference, said flexibility and innovation among Maine businesses — including boatyards — is crucial.

"We're here to educate each other about what are the opportunities and what are the barriers," said Van Vogt. "[This conference] is an opportunity to help ourselves make the leap."