

Press Release From MTCARES

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I-180 is a proposed ballot initiative requiring Montana's investor-owned utilities to generate 80% of their 2050 electricity from renewable, non-polluting sources like the wind and sun. Supporters are gathering signatures through the MTCARES.org website to put the measure on the November ballot.

Addressing criticism by NorthWestern Energy and the Montana Environmental Information Center (MEIC), I-180 attorney Russ Doty explained: "After NorthWestern adds 23% renewable energy to its system (by 2025), electricity from the dams will count toward reaching the 80% goal. I-180 is written to accommodate hydro power installed prior to 2005, but only after the output from such legacy hydro plus 23% additional renewable energy will equal 80%.

In an MEIC article, Kyla Maki opposes I-180 as "inconsequential," partly because she fears utilities will use their considerable influence to defeat the initiative. Maki also dislikes the fact that I-180 would allow hydro facilities to be counted in meeting renewable energy mandates after 2025.

"However," Doty said, "Maki failed to clarify the legal reasons why I-180 was drafted to avoid a court challenge. I-180 treats NorthWestern and Montana Dakota Utilities' (MDU) equally while taking into account their differing generation mixes. It's significant to get NorthWestern to cut its carbon footprint in half by 2025 while also getting MDU to add 65% renewables. Thus, the 80% fossil-fuel-free electricity goal applies equally to both utilities."

John Alke, a lawyer for NorthWestern energy, sees I-180 differently from MEIC. Alke alleged: "NorthWestern's recently acquired hydro facilities could not be counted in meeting the 50 percent renewable mandate for 2030" required by I-180.

"Wrong!" exclaimed Doty. "Look at I-180, section 3(4). You'll see that NorthWestern is misinforming voters. Energy from the dams will count after 2025."

Doty concluded, "If I-180 did not allow the dams to be credited to reach the (80%) renewable requirement in 2025, consumers would be paying for green electrons from windfarms to replace green electrons from the dams."

An MEIC member differing with Maki, Pamela Morris said “MEIC does not have a viable alternative plan to cut CO2. Nobody else in Montana does either. We cannot always be sure of success. But, we must act in the face of adversity because failure also will occur if we do not try to circumvent the 25,000+ jobs that will be lost in Montana’s agriculture, recreation, and tourism industries if we allow more CO2 to drive record global temperatures even higher.”

“I-180 is a practical forward looking proposal to transition to clean power over 33 years -- something citizens can do when the politicians won’t,” Morris said. “This initiative offers Montana the potential to compete economically with states like Iowa which already produces 31% of its electricity from the wind. Montanans who also view I-180 as the best way forward can learn how to sign the petition by emailing your town and contact information to gather@mtcares.org .”