FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
March 24, 2011

CONTACT:
Erin Greeson
(503) 223-4544, erin@rnp.org

Renewable energy leaders: Capital investment to surpass $5.4 billion in Oregon this year

Sectors detail jobs, rural and urban economic recovery, importance of clean energy

PORTLAND, Ore. – Oregon’s renewable energy leaders today announced a major milestone in economic development for the state. This year, capital investment in Oregon wind, solar and geothermal energy will top $5.4 billion, according to Renewable Northwest Project, a nonprofit advocacy organization based in Portland.

Renewable energy leaders hailed this as a significant sign of progress as Oregon moves to diversify its energy portfolio while focusing on renewable energy industries as a statewide economic development strategy.

“At a time of heightened focus on global energy crises, Oregon’s clean renewable resources offer least-cost, least-risk energy for the long term,” said Rachel Shimshak, executive director at Renewable Northwest Project.

Government officials, educators, labor and industry leaders gathered Thursday to applaud the $5.4 billion milestone and to detail aspects of the return on that investment during a Renewable Northwest Project press conference at Iberdrola Renewables Northwest American Headquarters in Portland.

The economic benefits of wind energy are clear in Sherman County, Ore., where rolling wheat fields on rural lands are a key area for development. Wind projects have brought over $2 billion to Sherman County; Portland-based Iberdrola Renewables alone has invested more than $1 billion.

“Wind farms have brought more than $17 million in property taxes and investments into Sherman County,” said Judge Gary Thompson, Sherman County Board of Commissioners. “That translates to meeting essential community needs like fire departments and health services, new supplies for students, and capital projects like construction of a new school, library and city hall.”

“We are proud to partner with residents of rural areas like Sherman County, who are preserving their traditional family farms by harvesting wind as an added kind of crop. In urban Oregon, our Northwest American Headquarters staffs 350 people, filling high-wage and high-tech jobs in our region,” said Sara McMahon Parsons, a wind energy developer at Iberdrola Renewables. “Our projects are bringing jobs, economic development and clean, renewable energy to the entire state,” Parsons added.
Guest speakers like Glenn Montgomery, executive director of Oregon Solar Energy Industries Association, discussed the role of solar industries in achieving the $5.4 billion landmark. “For the past three years, the solar industry has been a very bright star in Oregon’s dull economic sky. While most industries have contracted, solar has enjoyed significant expansion, along with other renewable technologies.

Leaders representing the Oregon workforce played a key role in detailing the importance of renewable industries’ presence. “Renewable energy projects provided jobs in the construction trades even at the height of the recession, when our sector was hit hardest,” said John Mohlis, executive secretary of the Oregon State Building and Construction Trades Council. “They offer a key economic recovery path, not just for energy companies, but for dozens of industries and many workers across the state.”

Leaders from Oregon’s education community addressed the link between renewable industries, innovation and preparing a workforce for the future. “Rural Oregon is hard-hit by the loss of timber and aluminum industries. Renewable energy offers a new future for older workers, as well as graduating high school seniors, provided they obtain the training and education to compete for these family-wage careers,” said Dan Spatz, college foundation director and chief institutional advancement officer at Columbia Gorge Community College.

Shimshak concluded: “Renewable energy resources offer the best choice for healthy economies, communities and the environment. We are proud of the progress that Oregon has achieved, and we urge state leaders and citizens to further advance Oregon’s clean energy leadership and the benefits it brings to our communities.”

Renewable Northwest Project is a regional nonprofit advocacy organization promoting responsible development of renewable energy resources in the Northwest. For more information, visit www.rnp.org.

###

Media contact: Erin Greeson, Renewable Northwest Project, (503) 223-4544, erin@rnp.org

Video footage is available by request.