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Fair celebrates power of sun and wind

lition aims to show small changes can make a difference

BY JENNIFER WILLIS

The Portland Tribune Aug 22, 2006

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Sellwood Riverfront k played host Saturday e Clean Energy Fair.

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Organized by the national advocacy group Alaska Coalition, the event helped raise awareness about oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge specifically, about alternative energy in general.



JONATHAN HOUSE / PAMPLIN MEDIA GROUP
Robert Shields of Sustainable Solutions Unlimited shows off a wind turbine and solar-powered safety light at the Clean Energy Fair on Saturday.

The Alaska Coalition focuses on protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil drilling, and one of the best ways to do that, event organizers say, is to concentrate on alternative sources of energy.

“We’ve been focusing on other solutions rather than oil drilling,” said Laurele Fulkerson, Alaska Coalition’s West Coast organizer, who lives in Portland. “We’re trying to promote clean energy solutions as the alternative, to bring awareness to what we can do to protect our wild spaces.”

“I lived in Alaska for three years. I have a really strong passion for protecting it,” said Shoren Brown, who works out of the coalition’s Washington, D.C.’s office as its national outreach director.

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“Congress should refocus their efforts on a clean-energy agenda, and coming up with real solutions that create good American jobs that are long-lasting, rather than this incredible focus on continuing our oil addiction.”

Sun shines for solar

Intended to educate the public on how little changes in energy use can make a significant difference, the fair featured workshops and speakers on topics from practical solar applications to vegetable-oil conversion for diesel vehicles.

There also were youth-themed workshops and games. Entertainment included performances by Blue Zebra, Ashbury Park, Mars Retrieval Unit, Surrounded by Ninjas, Cross-eyed Rosie and Tye North and Friends.

Most of the booths represented Oregon-based firms. Portland’s Sustainable Solutions Unlimited was set up to inform people about clean energy incentives and programs, and Marketing Director Robert Shields’ message was clear: “We want to see people looking in history books for fossil fuels, not at gas stations.”

Manning the Mr. Sun Solar table, Jeff Cropp hoped people would understand that “we can save energy and save the environment at the same time. We’re working to reduce people’s electric loads, their gas bills, and trying to offset fossil fuel use with a cleaner, more sustainable form of energy, and save them money.”

The weather was perfect for promoting solar power, and the stage and workshops were powered by a solar truck from the city of Portland.

“It’s a great sunny day,” Brown said. “It reinforces the fact that we could be harvesting energy from the sun rather than drilling for oil in Alaska.”

Families picnicked along the waterfront and under shady trees. Others strolled the waterfront with their dogs or rode bikes.

Mariele Young and Brian Kilgore sat in the grass and enjoyed food from the event’s only food vendor, Takai Thai Cuisine. Young had learned about getting involved with clean energy, and Kilgore collected pamphlets on solar power.

“I’m particularly interested in solar energy,” Kilgore said. “I’m looking to pressure my parents, who are homeowners, into doing it.”

Biodiesel is a big draw

A popular attraction was the Alternative Energy Coalition’s biodiesel Mercedes-Benz.

Through presentations on waste vegetable oil as an alternative fuel, Loren Fennel hoped people would “learn interdependence and to be self-sufficient, and to not be afraid of something – such as straight vegetable-oil conversions on a diesel engine – that’s been around for 150 years.”

Also displaying biodiesel vehicles were Organics to You, which delivers organic produce to Portland homes, and the Oregon Bus Project, on hand to register young Oregon voters.

The Audubon Society of Portland was promoting Measure 26-80 for Natural Areas, Parks and Streams on the November ballot. Portland Audubon President Linda Craig is a member of the Alaska Coalition steering committee, and she provided information about the 70 bird species active along the Oregon coast.

“About half of these birds nest in the Arctic,” Craig said. “When we’re talking about the Arctic, we’re really talking about things that affect our Oregon bird populations.”

Amanda Inskeep represented Pacific Power’s Blue Sky renewable energy

program.

“Clean energy is not as difficult as it seems,” Inskeep said. “The people here today are offering different ways to help clean up the environment. You can just choose a couple of them and make a big difference.”

Other sponsors and exhibitors included Flexcar, Hip Chicks Do Wine, KBOO (90.7 FM), Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility, OSPIRG, Sierra Club, Solar Energy Association of Oregon, Ecumenical Ministries Interfaith Power and Light Program, Environmental Justice Action Group, Gifford Pinchot Task Force, Green Mountain Energy, Old Lompoc Brewing Co., Save Our Wild Salmon, Taoist Tai Chi Society of Oregon and the Climate Trust.

“At the end of the day, I hope people leave feeling empowered, that they can do small things in their lives to conserve energy and not have to be so dependent on oil,” said the Alaska Coalition’s Brown.

“Now more than ever we need people to engage and contact their elected representatives, and send the message that we need to keep Alaska wild.”

Brown estimates 600 people came out to enjoy the music and learn more about clean energy.

“We’ve already decided we’re going to turn it into an annual event,” he said. “The support from the community just reinforced that we could put on a great event and send a clear message to Congress about the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.”

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