

Report: 30 Pct. Renewable Energy Mandate Doable

David Eggert, Associated Press

LANSING, Mich. (AP) -- Michigan is positioned to double its share of electricity from wind and other renewable sources within two decades but risks falling behind other states if nothing is done, state officials said in a final report issued to Gov. Rick Snyder on Monday.

State law sets a 10 percent renewable power standard that must be met by the end of 2015. The report says 15 percent renewable electricity in 2020 and 30 percent in 2035 are "achievable" under all scenarios, including even halving related surcharges added to residential and business utility bills to pay mainly for new wind turbines.

"It is ... clear that since the Michigan RPS was enacted, the costs of renewable energy, particularly onshore wind and solar, have dropped noticeably," the study said.

The findings are designed to help the Republican governor and lawmakers when they revisit a 2008 law that instituted renewable power and energy-efficiency mandates while limiting competition in the electricity market. Final reports on electricity competition and energy-efficiency requirements are due later in November.

State Public Service Commission Chairman John Quackenbush and Steve Bakkal, director of the Michigan Energy Office, led the renewable energy study at Snyder's request and said changes were made based on more than 1,000 new comments since a draft report was issued in September. The report says the state's two dominant utilities, Consumers Energy and DTE Energy, have created 2,500 jobs to meet renewable requirements — most of them temporary construction jobs.

Environmental groups and others said the report should spur legislative action.

"Now, we will be looking to leaders in the Legislature, from both sides of the aisle, to pull together for a stronger standard that saves us money, creates jobs and cleans up the environment," Jack Schmitt, deputy director for the Michigan League of Conservation Voters, said in a written statement.

In all, 29 states and Washington, D.C., have renewable energy standards.

Michigan's 10 percent mandate is less ambitious than most of those states', says the report, which also stresses that an apples-to-apples comparison is difficult because states differ on what resources are considered renewable and on the timelines for meeting requirements.

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Michigan voters last year rejected a proposed constitutional amendment that would have ordered utilities to generate 25 percent of their power from alternatives to coal, natural gas or other fossil fuels by 2025.

Steve Transeth, senior policy director for the Michigan Jobs and Energy Coalition — which includes utility companies and business groups — said the report is balanced and credited the authors for balancing between the "theoretically possible and practically feasible." He cautioned that reaching some goals will require significant upgrades in the grid and said he hopes Michigan puts more emphasis on non-renewable sources like nuclear and natural gas that are cleaner than coal-fired plants.

It is not clear when Snyder or lawmakers will act on the report. While next year is an election year, former Democratic Gov. Jennifer Granholm and the Legislature approved the 2008 energy rewrite just before the November election.

"Just by the nature of this town I would think it won't be until 2015," said Transeth, a former PSC commissioner.

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