

The Marin County Secession

The Seeds of a Full-blown Renewable Power Rebellion

By Chris Nelder | Friday, January 15th, 2010

Another type of secession is playing out right now, right here, which could become a model for the rest of the country.

In 2002, California passed a state law (AB 117) allowing communities to form their own entities to buy electrical power as so-called Community Choice Aggregations (CCAs). The notion is that CCAs could choose to buy more renewable energy than the existing investor owned utility (IOU) monopolies provide, while those utilities continue to own and maintain the distribution network and billing.

State revenues normally distributed to utility energy efficiency programs, plus the usual charges per kilowatt-hour, would be redirected to the CCAs, enabling them to buy green energy and alleviate the need for building new peak-capacity plants (typically powered by natural gas). Customers are automatically enrolled in the CCAs unless they opt out.

According to the *New York Times*, the nation's first test of the concept in Ohio has been an unmitigated success with 126 municipalities participating in 67 CCAs, providing power to about 800,000 customers with only a 5% opt-out rate. The latest supply contract signed by one of the CCAs, the Northeast Ohio Public Energy Council (NOPEC) offers rates 6% lower than the local utility. Thank you, Ohio.

In California, however, it's been a long road for those who have taken it. None have succeeded yet.