

# Homeowners in Wyo. snap up renewable energy grants

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Published: Monday, January 18, 2010 12:52 PM MST

CHEYENNE — Big developers aren't the only ones pursuing Wyoming's renewable energy resources.

Wyoming homeowners quickly claimed \$2.25 million in federal stimulus funds as part of a recent state program for residential renewable energy projects.

The State Energy Office is finalizing grant agreements so about 330 people can get started on projects to install solar, wind or ground-source heat energy systems at their homes, Program Manager Shannon Stanfill said.

The office obligated the funding in less than 10 days in December, and another 265 people — with almost \$2 million in requests — are on a waiting list. However, there are currently no plans to add more funding to the program, according to the office.

"We knew that there was a lot of pent-up demand, and we were prepared to deal with that demand over what I thought would be about a six-month period," Stanfill said. "What I was very surprised about was that we had all the funds obligated in 10 days."

The program offered grants of up to \$10,000 or 50 percent of project costs, whichever was less, for adding renewable energy at homes. Stanfill said homeowners may be able to start installing the projects as soon as next month.

Of the 332 original applicants, about 64 percent were for wind turbines, about 30 percent were solar panels and about 5 percent were for ground-source heat systems, Stanfill said. Ground-source heat systems circulate fluid through underground pipes to draw on the earth's temperature for home heating and cooling.

Laramie County resident Ray Martin applied for about \$9,600 in stimulus funding from the State Energy Office. He said he plans to install two 2.4-kilowatt wind turbines to help power his home. The state program offers reimbursement of \$2,000 per installed kilowatt.

"When you live in country like we do, where you have both incredible solar resources and wind resources, to my way of thinking as a homeowner, if you don't make use of that, you're missing a great opportunity," Martin said.

The federal government also offers a 30 percent tax credit on the cost of a residential wind turbines.

"What previously would have been roughly a \$13,000 installation per unit is reduced to roughly \$5,000 per unit with both the tax credit and the grant being considered," Martin said. "That's what makes the benefit-cost analysis quite good."

Kevin Beers, president of Cheyenne Wind Energy Inc., said he expects his business to increase fourfold this year as a result of the stimulus grants. Some customers delayed wind projects because they were aware of the pending stimulus funding, he said.

The complete installation of a 2.4-kilowatt wind turbine costs \$13,500, Beers said. The energy production of such turbines varies, but they typically produce between 400 and 500 kilowatt hours of electricity per month, he said.

By comparison, the typical Cheyenne home — not including electrically heated homes — uses 750 to 800 kilowatt hours of electricity per month, said Rob Morris of Cheyenne Light, Fuel and Power.

"I tell people green energy is not cheap energy," Beers said. "Green energy is expensive energy, and without the incentives, it's really tough to get the dollars to work."