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Gauging the Wind, Drawing from the Sun

Another AWEA WINDPOWER conference has come and gone. The months of careful planning and countless decisions culminated to a whirlwind of meetings, handshakes, and business card swaps. Though conference attendance was down from the previous year, I felt that the general consensus was of an event more concentrated and focused; likely due to industry contraction and business consolidations.

This annual conference presents an important opportunity to reconnect with clients and friends, and generate new business. It allows all who attend to get a pulse on the industry and revisit wind energy market strategies. To date, we've been fortunate with an active year in the business; however, forecasting business opportunities more than a few weeks out has proven difficult in recent years. We look to the WINDPOWER conference to gauge how the remainder of the current year may play out and to catch a glimpse of the first quarter of the following year.

Though the conference itself generally lends an air of excitement to most conversations, I was encouraged by the positive tone of many of our clients in regard to ongoing and planned projects. Myriad challenges continue to buffet the wind industry, but our clients persist in finding ways to make viable projects happen despite the increasingly difficult circumstances.

One way they do this is by diversifying beyond wind and into solar development. Solar energy's current timetable of federal support, small project footprints, decreasing equipment costs, and daily power characteristics are factors spurring growth of the industry. We found that the WINDPOWER conference yielded as many solar-specific conversations as wind. While it would be understandable to lament some of the re-focus to solar from some wind energy developers, we're eager for the additional opportunities that this shift presents. It's a test of the flexibility of any business to grow and change as their clients do, regardless of the types of projects in their pipeline.

This year's AWEA WINDPOWER conference wasn't a simple continuation of the past years'. The wind industry is changing and the solar industry is capturing more of the renewable energy spotlight. The absence of a cohesive federal energy policy and mounting concerns over runaway debt may have serious implications for both wind and solar development. Conversely, forecasts of long term increasing energy usage, planned decommissioning of coal based power, and concerns over nuclear safety may well translate into much more reliance on renewable resources. These factors have created an evolving set of challenges and opportunities for the remainder of this year and into the next.

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