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## Bailout charges green energy programs

By Scott Nicholson

A \$700 billion bailout plan may have calmed racing pulses on Wall Street, but it also excited those who are rolling down Green Avenue.

The bailout legislation adds or extends tax breaks that boost renewable energy and the development of new sustainable technologies.

"These tax credits have been marching along," said Brent Summerville of the Appalachian State University Energy Center, adding energy advocates have been "fighting for them for a long time."

Tax credits for renewable-energy development and other forms of research were an important political element of the legislation, but the practical effect could be an immediate burst of new wind turbines and solar panels.

The renewable energy incentives in the federal legislation include an eight-year extension of investment credits for solar energy, as well as credits for wind, geothermal and other energy sources. Advocates say the credits will produce an extra 440,000 jobs and more than \$230 billion in investments by 2016.

Small-wind research has been a focus of the ASU Energy Center, with a research station on Beech Mountain among its educational efforts. Smaller wind turbines have been gradually gaining popularity while the fight over large-scale wind turbines continues.

"Small wind turbines have a tax credit now, between \$1,000 and \$4,000, and coupled with a state tax break, that creates a pretty strong motivator," Summerville said.

"That goes all the way through 2016, so that's a good one. It puts small-wind energy on par with solar energy."

Summerville said, "It makes sense to have both small wind and solar credits. We've seen a lot of interest and do a lot of consultations. The up-front cost is typically the largest barrier, so cutting that down will enable people to afford projects."

The bail-out package also boosts green transportation. One credit makes employers exempt from taxation for what they spend on some fringe benefits for workers who commute to work by bicycle. A new tax credit ranging from \$2,500 to \$7,500 will go to buyers of plug-in electric-drive vehicles.

"It's all interrelated in many ways," Summerville said. "Transportation and energy. An increase in gas (prices) affects everything."

Summerville said the tax credit for plug-in cars will immediately affect buying and manufacturing decisions, as well as strengthen the bond between cars and renewable energy sources.

"That's a good way to reduce our consumption of oil," Summerville said. "We're greening our energy supply and we can put that energy directly into cars and replace the oil. That's the direct connection between wind power and cars. I think that's a great credit, to encourage plug-in hybrids."

Summerville said manufacturers have already changed their product lines in response to energy concerns, with more hybrid models, while also producing vehicles that get better gas mileage.

The Western North Carolina Renewable Energy Initiative is an ASU Energy Center project dedicated to helping create a sustainable energy future for the region, and provides resources and help for any energy-related question.

"We give out information galore and help people understand what resources we have," Summerville said. "We help them understand what they can do and how to do it."

The center can estimate local wind resources using the high-resolution North Carolina wind resource map and offers free site assessments that include a report on available incentives and local installers.

The center also promotes solar, wind and microhydraulic energy at regional events, providing public presentations for civic groups, farm groups, environmental groups, schools, fairs, festivals and conferences.

The ASU Energy Center, Department of Technology and ARISE (Appalachian Regional Initiative for Sustainable Energy) teamed up on a small demonstration house on wheels called "Daisy." The mobile unit is used as an education station that travels to show the advantages of solar and wind energy and is one example of the university and community partnership that is strengthening the region's "green" identity.

ASU Energy Center is part of the university, with a majority of the funding coming from the North Carolina Energy Office.



Brent Summerville tends to Daisy, the mobile education station that promotes renewable energy. Photo submitted

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