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## **Michigan consumers take on Cherryland Electric over coal plant**

### **Media push begins to influence annual meeting of member-owners**

TRAVERSE CITY – A coalition of consumers, watchdog groups, and environmentalists are taking to the airwaves to influence the board of directors voting for Cherryland Electric Co-op. A series of TV and radio ads began airing June 7 to encourage co-op members to vote for anti-coal plant candidates who see clean energy options as better, more responsible business.

“Cherryland and Wolverine Co-ops were told that there was no need to spend billions of dollars to build this plant,” said Tom Karas of Michigan Energy Alternatives Project, “but management of these utilities won’t pull the plug on the Rogers City coal plant. They keep wanting to gamble with their member’s money. Appealing the State’s decision would only make a sad economic story even sadder for members”

On May 21, the Michigan Department of Natural Resources and Environment denied Wolverine’s air permit, stating that there was no need for the power the plant would produce and that there were alternative ways to meet the power needs in the future.

Governor Jennifer Granholm affirmed the decision, saying the plant was a “job killer” because its higher electric rates would scare away new business and new jobs.

Since then, Cherryland’s general manager has said the company knew the plant wouldn’t be cheap, but it was “affordable.” Wolverine’s legislative director also told reporters that the ruling could be easily appealed and the Governor acted outside her office. Those comments, according Maureen Charbonneau, explain why she is running for a seat on the Cherryland board.

“They apparently want to keep gambling with our money,” Charbonneau said, “but it’s not theirs to gamble. It’s ours; the members are the real owners of the co-op.”

A TV spot is set to run on local NBC affiliate, WPBN-TV, from June 7-16. It urges co-op members to send in the ballot included in their May Country Lines magazine or attend the annual meeting, at Wuerful Park at 3pm on June 16. Radio spots are also airing throughout the day on radio stations WJML, WCCW, and WTCM and Newstalk AM 850. Postcards reminding ratepayers about the meeting were mailed on June 7.

“Clearly, Cherryland isn’t getting the message,” said Tiffany Hartung, with the Michigan chapter of the Sierra Club, which created the mailer. “Michigan doesn’t need this dirty, costly coal plant. If this board won’t respect consumers’ requests for a cheaper, cleaner alternative than coal, then we need a new board at Cherryland.”

The claim of cheaper and cleaner has recently been reinforced by reports in both the Detroit Free Press and the Bay City Times. Out of the original 150 coal plant proposals the United States was facing three years ago, 125 have been withdrawn, mostly due to economic reasons.

For more info go to <http://www.Co-opConversations.org/>. To view the new video ads being aired on local TV, visit <http://Youtube.com/> and enter “Cherryland Electric.”

Read Anne Woiwode’s letter to the editor in the *Traverse City Record Eagle* below or click on this link: <http://record-eagle.com/opinion/x1385495008/Forum-Unanswered-questions-cost-TCL-P>

**Forum: Unanswered  
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Woiwode

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**By ANNE WOIWODE**

**---- (<http://record-eagle.com>)**

Traverse City is one of the most progressive communities when it comes to pursuing non-fossil-fuel energy sources, and residents deserve a lot of credit for that. However, the city got waylaid with the idea that biomass electric generation was a no-lose situation.

Despite a lot of requests that Traverse City Light & Power carefully consider the full impact of these proposed plants on the forests and pollution, Light & Power declined to do a complete environmental review.

The news that the biomass plants are on hold and that Light & Power will look at natural gas opens the window for all alternatives to get consideration.

What was most troubling in the article announcing the hold on biomass is Light & Power's suggestion that the problem was its inability to sell the plan to the public. That misses the boat entirely. An intelligent and informed public raised many questions that officials in Traverse City dodged or declined to answer.

Public officials thought the right thing to do was to hire people to convince the public to go along with a project instead of opening up discussion and answering the many valid questions raised. This is an object lesson about what our representative democracy is about — the decision-makers are tasked with making hard decisions, but their first job is to make sure they have asked and

answered all the right questions, not to make a decision and then try to figure how to sell it.

One unanswered question was where the wood would come from to run the plant. There was not enough waste wood; and much of the standing timber being counted on to provide wood for these plants is not actually available, and other biomass and biofuel plant proposals in the northern Lower Peninsula and the eastern Upper Peninsula overlap the draw area for these plants.

This remains a huge issue that the state must address in a comprehensive way before permitting or providing funding for more projects, instead of simply repeating the misleading statement that Michigan is growing more wood than we cut.

If you live in the area of a proposed biomass or biofuels plant and have a woodlot, wouldn't you like to know whether the company is intent on using your timber as part of their pool? If you are the customer of a publicly owned utility, wouldn't you like to know if they knew where the fuel was going to come from before investing millions in a plant?

The last line of the article talks about there being no silver bullet for the energy issues we face. Bingo! That means it is time to make sure big decisions, whether coal, biomass, wind, solar or anything else other than reducing energy use, are addressed in a comprehensive way.

We must look at site-specific opportunities and barriers, require good environmental review and weigh trade-offs. Light & Power has the opportunity now to continue being a real leader in Michigan's energy future.

**About the author:** Anne Woiwode is the state director for the Sierra Club Michigan Chapter.

**About the forum:** The forum is a periodic column of opinion written by Record-Eagle readers in their areas of interest or expertise. Submissions of 500 words or less may be made by e-mailing [letters@record-eagle.com](mailto:letters@record-eagle.com) (<mailto:letters@record-eagle.com>). Please include biographical information and a photo.

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