

Maine developer urges more tidal power cooperation in Bay of Fundy

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The tidal power industry in Maine and Nova Scotia should be working closely together to answer environmental questions, an energy forum heard Thursday in Halifax.

John Ferland, director of project development with Ocean Renewable Power Co., said a regional approach would save money and help the industry develop.

“There’s a great opportunity to take the research infrastructure and expertise, and project focus, that exists in Nova Scotia and align it with what we’re doing in Maine, and vice versa,” he said during an international panel on tidal energy development.

Ocean Renewable, based in Portland, Maine, expects to become the first commercial tidal power producer in the United States later this year. Its project in Cobscook Bay, at the mouth of the Bay of Fundy near the Canada-U.S. border, is slated to begin supplying electricity to Bangor Hydro Electric Co. starting in October.

The company is putting a single 150-kilowatt turbine in the water this year and plans to add additional ones starting next year.

Ferland said the two countries should be sharing the results of environmental studies on the Bay of Fundy ecosystem instead of duplicating research.

“The fish are no different. The mammals are no different,” he said. “In fact, I think the mammals we would count would probably be the same mammals that get counted in (Nova Scotia).”

The Ocean Renewable director said the developers on this side of the border can learn from the American company’s experience with the federal and state regulatory process.

For instance, publishing the results of environmental studies sooner could make it easier to get projects approved, Ferland said.

“There’s equipment going into the water, policies being set, projects in the planning stage and research data being collected. But when a regulator goes to the literature, it’s not quite there. We’ve got to move that along at a quicker pace.”

Ocean Renewable already has a strategic partnership with Westport-based Fundy Tidal Inc., which has proposed several small-scale tidal projects in Digby Neck and Cape Breton as part of Nova Scotia’s community feed-in tariff program.

Fundy Tidal founder Dana Morin said he supports more regional co-operation in environmental research but isn't sure how that would mesh with various regulators in two countries.

“If we didn't have to redo those works in different jurisdictions when we are that similar, it would be very helpful,” said the Nova Scotia company's director of business development.

“Just divvy up the work, shine and excel at what we do best, and share that.”

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