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Great River Energy Announces an End to Coal

Montevideo, MN, May 8, 2020 – Great River Energy (GRE) announced Thursday that it would close one of its two remaining coal-fired power plants and repower the other with natural gas; both are in North Dakota. It will also shift new investment to cleaner, more affordable wind power to the benefit of the rural electric co-op member-owners it serves. Wholesale power costs are expected to drop 12-13%. Carbon pollution will be reduced by 95%. GRE serves 28 electric distribution cooperatives, 24 in Minnesota.

“With this announcement, GRE has given up its historic ranking as one of America’s dirtiest electricity generators and sets a new standard as perhaps America’s cleanest,” said Duane Ninneman, CURE Executive Director. “GRE co-op members across Minnesota will benefit from this decision. Our members and our rural co-op neighbors applaud GRE for this historic action.” CURE is a rural nonprofit that, in part, focuses on issues related to rural electric cooperatives.

This decision comes with mounting pressure from rural electric co-op members and advocates in the clean energy community for GRE to move away from coal to cleaner electricity generation. The move also comes with some urgency as the faltering economics of coal power generation burdens co-op members with unnecessarily high costs. Now, with the steady decline in the price of clean renewable energy and GRE’s shift to more wind, co-op members served by GRE will reap the benefits.

According to Erik Hatlestad, Energy Democracy Program Director at CURE, “Rural co-op members will now buy electricity that is cleaner and cheaper, and GRE’s shift to build new wind generation in rural Minnesota’s will directly benefit our local communities.” Hatlestad went on to say, “We’re also hoping that GRE’s new business plan will evolve over time to include more local distribution co-ops’ member-owners playing a larger role in generating local power. Co-op member-owners should share directly in the benefits of the new clean energy economy.”

GREs announcement today included:

- Retire the 1,151-megawatt (MW) Coal Creek Station in the second half of 2022
- Add 1,100 MW of wind energy purchases primarily from Minnesota by the end of 2023

- Modify the 99-MW, coal and natural gas-based Spiritwood Station combined heat and power plant to be fueled by natural gas
- Install a 1-MW, long-duration battery demonstration system in Cambridge, MN

CURE is a rural peoples' organization with offices in Montevideo, Minnesota. CURE's Energy Democracy Program has been critical of certain rural electric cooperative governance practices and has recently released reports such as *The Rural Electric Cooperative Scorecard* and *Rural Electrification 2.0*. With a focus on strategies to impact climate, energy, and environmental justice, the Energy Democracy Program strives to build grassroots community power to address the linkages between environmental challenges, societal inequities, and other systemic challenges facing our communities.

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