

ENERGY COMPANIES TEST BATTERY

By The Associated Press

GREAT FALLS - A U.S. defense contractor is planning to test the speed at which a battery can store and release energy using a wind turbine in Cascade County.

The \$307,000 project is being privately funded by Helena-based Exergy Development, which built the Horse Shoe Bend wind farm near Great Falls, and NorthWestern Energy.

On Tuesday, Cascade County commissioners approved an agreement with Alexandria, Va.-based Ashlawn Group LLC that will allow the company to conduct a year of research on a vanadium redox battery using a 50-kilowatt wind turbine at the county shop.

The company will measure how quickly the battery can be charged from electricity produced by the wind turbine and how quickly energy can be released, said Commissioner Peggy Beltrone.

"We are hopeful that this test will provide that the technology can be used to make our wind resource more valuable," she said.

Technology to store electricity is important in wind power development because wind-generated electricity is intermittent.

A "very, very large battery" will be tested that, if successful, could be produced in different sizes for different-sized wind facilities.

The test results will only be available to NorthWestern Energy and Exergy Development.

Cascade County would also be first in line for a second phase of testing of a much larger battery.

The agreement also calls for Ashlawn to provide guidance and technology to assist the Montana State University-Great Falls College of Technology, which is interested in offering electrical storage classes.