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EDITORIAL

Alternative energy could be big job-maker for state

Alternative energy no longer is just a pipe dream of the environmental movement.

Our nation's dependence on an uncertain supply of foreign oil, concerns about carbon dioxide emissions and other factors gradually are boosting the economic viability of developing energy sources that utilize the sun, wind, water and other means.

Gov. Jennifer Granholm wants Michigan to become a leader in alternative energy not so much because of the environmental benefits but rather for the tremendous potential to create jobs in the state.

Citing estimates that the alternative energy sector could create as many as 40 million jobs by 2030, Granholm wants our state to take full advantage of its abundant natural resources, strong network of research facilities and a trained work force to become home for as many of those jobs as possible.

She set the tone this past summer with her investment mission to Sweden and Germany, which yielded a partnership between Swedish and U.S. companies that will result in using waste from the paper pulping process to create synthetic gas at an Upper Peninsula paper mill.

Granholm now is pushing for Michigan to fully utilize what she calls its five w's - water, wood, wind, waste and work force - to be on the leading edge of alternative energy production. Last week's Midwest governors meeting on energy gave her a chance to promote her vision of Michigan using its unique geographical gifts and industrial history to capitalize on the alternative energy movement.

With the state's first "wind farm" now under way in The Thumb, Granholm thinks Michigan is well positioned to become the production center for the massive wind turbines and other equipment needed to generate electrical power using wind. The state's transportation network and manufacturing capacity should serve it well in attracting industries that want to serve the wind-energy market.

The governor's energy vision is wide-ranging: The state's massive inventory of publicly owned lands, all of which are under sustainable growth management plans, can be used to turn forestry waste products into various forms of energy. The currents undulated along the bottom of the Great Lakes can be harnessed to produce energy. Instead of releasing carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, capture

it and convert it to energy. Michigan's geology is particularly well-suited for storing large amounts of carbon dioxide underground.

The possibilities are exciting and vast, but we agree with the governor that one key measure for Michigan to become an alternative-energy leader is for lawmakers to mandate a renewal portfolio standard, as about half the states have done. Such a standard would require the state to generate a specific percentage of its energy from alternative or renewable sources by a specific date. Granholm would like to see "25 by '25" - 25 percent of the state's energy generated from alternative sources by 2025.

Such a standard would give the energy industry incentive to develop and promote alternative energy. Most of Michigan's electrical power currently is generated using coal or natural gas, and utility companies already recognize the environmental and supply challenges posed by those sources long-term. They know that they need to cultivate other energy sources, but they also need the economic pressure to do so. A renewal portfolio standard would help create an atmosphere where all utility companies would be encouraged to gradually move away from their dependence on fossil fuels.

It seems clear that the alternative-energy industry is posed to thrive in the coming decades. It is equally evident that Michigan possesses many of the natural and human resources required to allow it to be at the forefront of that boom.

Now is the time to take action that will position our state well to compete. Let's not pass up this opportunity to create a strong and vibrant future for Michigan.
