

20 Years of Impact Shaping the Midwest Renewable Energy Marketplace

Kelley Welf, Communications Director • Mar. 28, 2022

Beth Soholt has been the Executive Director of Clean Grid Alliance for 20 years

As we continue celebrating 20 years of advancing renewable energy in the Midwest, it's important to recognize that Clean Grid Alliance has been woman-led by Executive Director Beth Soholt for all of its 20 years.

During this time, and under Beth's leadership, CGA has made significant contributions to the advancement of renewable energy in the Midwest by engaging in legislative, regulatory, and MISO processes. Past CGA Board Chair Julie Voeck, Senior Director, Legislative and Regulatory Affairs, NextEra Energy Resources, stated that through Beth's leadership, she has been able to balance the interests of many organizations within the renewable industry - including owners and operators of renewables as well as non-profit organizations to advance pro-renewable energy policies. "The state and local policy work where CGA is a recognized leader has resulted in a significant addition of renewable energy being developed across the Midwest and MISO region," said Voeck. "Through its leadership, CGA has tackled many challenging issues facing the industry, including supporting the development of significant transmission to enable renewable energy to access energy markets. Transmission is a multi-faceted regional issue that requires both significant technical expertise as well as strong collaboration across a multitude of stakeholders with varying interests."

Voeck pointed to the creation of the Land & Liberty Coalition as a particularly notable development that evolved from CGA identifying a barrier to development and forming a partnership with the Conservative Energy Network. Land & Liberty Coalition is focused on local siting and permitting issues that many renewable projects have faced.

Below are a few key results and the impact of CGA's involvement:

- **210% growth in wind capacity** in the Midwest in the last 10 years
- Expanded from 700 MW of wind in 2001 to more than 28,000 megawatts of renewable energy on the MISO grid today. This represents an **economic development investment of over \$50 billion in the Midwest**
- Engaged in nearly **3,000 miles of transmission line projects**, representing over **\$7 Billion in investment** into our infrastructure and enabling over **30,000 MW of renewables** to power our homes and businesses
- CGA's work in state legislatures resulted in an established Renewable Portfolio Standard or goal in most every MISO state
- Advocating for **saving time and money**, CGA's advocacy at MISO recently **reduced the time needed to complete the interconnection queue process by over 25%**
- **Streamlining regulatory processes** in several states to make the siting process more efficient

- Represents the Environmental Sector on MISO's Advisory Committee and Planning Advisory Committee
- Leading the way to add robust amounts of new utility scale solar projects to the electric grid

More History

In 2001, the Izaak Walton League of America (IWALA) embarked on a project to work on overcoming the two main hurdles facing utility-scale wind power development in the Midwest - bottlenecks in the power grid, and antiquated transmission rules. IWALA had been active in Minnesota Public Utilities Commission dockets regarding wind power commitments by Minnesota electric utility companies. The utilities and the regional transmission operator, Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO), began to raise concerns about transmission bottlenecks in getting wind power from rural southwest Minnesota to the load centers, explained Bill Grant, who was the IWALA Midwest Executive Director at the time. With that mission in mind, "Wind on the Wires" was born. The organization re-branded as "Clean Grid Alliance" in 2018 to better reflect its expanded focus on wind, solar and storage technologies. Yet, the organization's mission has remained intact for two decades, and has arguably become even more important.

Reflecting on CGA's history, current Chairman of the Board Adam Sokolski, Director, Legislative and Regulatory Affairs, EDF Renewables, recalled a trip to Southwest Minnesota's Buffalo Ridge area in the early 2000s. "The community in South Dakota really wanted wind development, but they couldn't get it and they didn't understand why. The conversation we had that day was the initial 'Wind on the Wires' discussion - some of the wind development that you want is locked in because there's no transmission to deliver it," said Sokolski.

"CGA's deep expertise on the physical energy system, broad and deep relationships, and regional presence positions it well to advance the transition we need to see to achieve the region's climate and clean energy goals," said Aimee Witteman, former Director of U.S. State Policy, Climate Imperative, and former McKnight Foundation Program Director, Midwest Climate & Energy. "CGA is an essential part of the clean energy advocacy fabric in the Midwest. Its deep knowledge, work to make clean energy a nonpartisan issue, and partnerships formed are some of the unique strengths of CGA. Its work with MISO and developers to transform the grid are essential elements of what needs to happen in the Midwest as we electrify the economy and provide clean energy for all."

CGA's leadership and engagement in the policy, regulatory, and technical processes at the state and regional level has been instrumental in driving the transition to a renewable energy economy in the Midwest. By uniting nonprofit and for-profit interests, CGA successfully crafts, then implements, clean energy policy initiatives. "The implementation piece, and our ability to build partnerships with key stakeholders and bring them to the table sets us apart from other advocacy organizations that primarily focus on setting policies," said Beth Soholt, Executive Director, Clean Grid Alliance. "We have a very knowledgeable team that works really hard to get 'er done."

"I had the pleasure of serving as Board Chair of CGA for five years and on the board for a decade," said Voeck. "During that time, CGA transitioned from a focus on wind to all forms of renewable energy, including solar and battery storage. CGA also recognized that policy decisions at the local, state, and regional level all have impacts on the ability to build renewables. They have been successful in advancing pro-renewable policy by developing coalitions and through collaboration with its diverse membership and stakeholders."

Beth Soholt - more "power behind the power"

"For the past 20 years, Beth Soholt has been the most tenacious, steadfast advocate for expanding the Midwest grid to accommodate the region's renewable energy resources. Her leadership has been critical to building the political and technical support among regulatory authorities, utilities and transmission owners, and renewable energy advocates needed to get new transmission approved.

*Adam Sokolski, CGA Chairman of the Board
Director, Legislative and Regulatory Affairs, EDF Renewables*

"Beth's and Clean Grid Alliance's work has directly led to new transmission lines being built which have been absolutely necessary to build wind and solar in the MISO footprint," continued Sokolski. "Without Beth, the Midwest would have far fewer megawatts of renewables installed."

"Beth has been able to balance the interests of many organizations within the renewable industry - including owners and operators of renewables as well as nonprofit organizations to advance pro-renewable energy policies. The state and local policy work, where CGA is a recognized leader, has resulted in the development of thousands of megawatts of renewable energy across the Midwest and MISO region," said Voeck. "It is through Beth's leadership that CGA has become a recognized pro-renewable policy leader through vision, determination and collaboration across multiple stakeholders."

Since Beth was officially hired as Wind on the Wires Executive Director on June 3, 2002, she has been working with the electric industry in various capacities. She has received numerous awards and acknowledgments over the years.

- Beth received her first **Wind Energy Advocacy Award** in 2006 from the American Wind Energy Association "for outstanding leadership and support of wind through effective advocacy."
- In 2011, the national group Women of Wind Energy (WoWE) named her **Woman of the Year**.
- Beth was selected by her peers as one of three NGO representatives on the **Stakeholder Steering Committee of the Eastern Interconnection Planning Collaborative (EIPC)**.
- The American Clean Power Association presented her with an "**Excellence in Transmission Advocacy**" award at the 2016 Windpower Conference in recognition of CGA's (WOW's) work on MISO's 17 Multi-Value Transmission Projects.
- Beth received an **Excellence Award in 2021** from the Energy Systems Integration Group (ESIG) for her leadership in advancing the understanding of the need for transmission for wind integration in the Upper Midwest.

Beth holds a seat on the CGA board of directors, and directs activities in the areas of technical/transmission planning, state regulatory proceedings, legislative education and outreach. She has held a seat on the Midcontinent Independent System Operator (MISO) Advisory Committee representing the Environmental Sector since 2002.