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Secretary Gassman Announces Grow Grant to Train Workers in Northwest Region for Jobs in Emerging Renewable Energy Sector

In Cable, Labor Secretary awards \$85,000, one of 10 grants in \$850,000 initiative

CABLE – As part of Governor Doyle’s \$850,000 Emerging Industries Skills Partnership initiative, Department of Workforce Development (DWD) Secretary Roberta Gassman today awarded the Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board an \$85,000 grant to train over 100 workers for timber industry jobs and position the region for production of cellulose-based ethanol from wood fiber.

The Emerging Industries Skills Partnership (EISP) is one aspect of Governor Doyle’s *Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps*, a comprehensive strategy for economic and workforce development. The grant that Secretary Gassman announced on his behalf will leverage \$50,000 in additional resources, providing total funding of \$135,000 for the project, *Power Northwest*.

“Wisconsin ranks among the leading renewable fuel states, annually producing 400 million gallons of ethanol, primarily corn-based ethanol,” Secretary Gassman said. “With our vast timber resources, we can easily surge ahead, simply by tapping timber industry waste, sawmill scrap and wood fiber as a source to produce ethanol. According to estimates, we can produce ethanol from wood cellulose at 50 cents a gallon, about half the cost of corn-based ethanol. By funding this project, the Governor’s EISP grant will ensure that we have the skilled workers trained and ready for the emerging renewable fuels industry. Furthermore, this grant will help us as a state and nation gain our energy independence.”

Secretary Gassman announced the grant at the Northwest Wisconsin Workforce Investment Board’s 6th annual Business Development Conference at Lakewoods Resort in Cable. The Northwest Wisconsin WIB’s primary partners in the *Power Northwest* project are Northcentral Technical College and Wisconsin Indianhead Technical College.

Besides Governor Doyle’s *Grow Wisconsin – The Next Steps* plan, Secretary Gassman also highlighted, as part of her luncheon address at the conference, the Governor’s new *Clean Energy Wisconsin* initiative, a comprehensive strategy to strengthen Wisconsin’s energy future. This comprehensive plan moves Wisconsin forward by promoting renewable energy, creating new jobs, increasing energy security and efficiency, and improving the environment.

As outlined by Secretary Gassman, the grant will enable the board and its partners to:

- Provide basic education and job skills training to 80 low-wage, low-skilled workers, and dislocated workers, opening career pathways in the timber industry and emerging renewable energy sector;
- Assist at least 17 loggers and timber harvest operators in gaining certificates as master loggers or timber harvest operators, confirming their training in best practices for forest management;
- Encourage at least 12 youth through a bio-industry academy to pursue careers in sustainable logging and forestry management;
- Give 50 Job Center staff short-term training at forums to help them guide dislocated workers, the unemployed and underemployed to good jobs in the timber industry and renewable fuels sector.

Among the project goals is to show pay increases for 75 percent of the 80 low-wage, low-skill workers who will receive basic education and skills training, and the 17 individuals who will receive advanced training for certification as master loggers and timber harvest operators.

The project also calls for outreach efforts by 30 Job Center staff on another one of Governor Doyle's workforce agenda items, training 40 percent of Wisconsin's production workers to meet the national Manufacturing Skill Standards Certification by 2016. Described as a passport to jobs of the future, the MSSC certifies that a manufacturing worker possesses necessary advanced manufacturing skills. At least 60 employers, labor leaders and others with an interest in advanced manufacturing will have opportunities to attend regional forums on MSSC and careers in advanced manufacturing.

Projections show that the region's natural resources, construction and mining sector will add nearly 700 new jobs in the decade ending 2014 for a ten-year change of 17.5 percent. The transportation and utilities industry group is expected to add 460 new jobs, an 11.6 percent increase, in the same period. The average annual wage for the region is \$25,334, or 24 percent below the state average and over 32 percent below the national average. Entry level jobs in the timber industry pay \$11 per hour. Median wages are closer to \$16 an hour.

Accepting the grant from Secretary Gassman was Steve Terry, Executive Director of the Northwest Wisconsin WIB. Besides the technical colleges, the board's partners include: Coalition for Eco-Industrial Development in Superior, Johnson Timber, the Park Falls Area community Development Corporation, and the economic development agencies of Barron, Douglas and Rusk counties.