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Energy Keepers, Inc. Embarks on Grant-funded Biomass Feasibility Study

(Polson, Mont.) In 2013, the Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribal enterprise, Energy Keepers, Inc. (EKI) received an \$800,000 grant from the U.S. Department of Energy to conduct a feasibility study on the Flathead Indian Reservation regarding a woody biomass energy facility.

Today EKI, partnered with the expertise of the Harris Group, Inc. a Seattle-based engineering design firm with over 40 years of biomass combustion experience, has begun a feasibility study to assess the prospects of creating a biomass energy plant on the reservation.

“Using woody biomass, normally an unused byproduct of CSKT’s sound forest management activities, to generate electricity and heat while creating good jobs would be a win-win for our reservation’s forests and our Tribal Members. We are excited that this study will provide the analysis necessary to determine if there is merit to this type of economic development.” said Brian Lipscomb, CEO of EKI. “We are pleased to join with the Harris Group and their experts to evaluate this project, and look forward to seeing if a biomass facility is a good fit for the Tribes.”

Specific steps that will be taken in the feasibility study include:

- Fuel Assessment: types and amounts of biomass economically available given delivery and harvest cost (some pre-feasibility work has been done in this area) and the potential contractual and or business arrangements with US Forestry
- Tribal energy load assessment: the energy (electrical and fossil fuel) consumed at all Pablo-area Tribal buildings
- Export markets and transmission and interconnection considerations
- Technology analysis: analysis of plant design will assess optimal (in terms of environmental impact, economics, and reliability) boiler technologies and turbine generators. In addition, it is possible that gasification technology could be employed to further enhance the environmental benefits of the project
- Economic and business model analysis: plant cost, financing costs and strategies, technology risk, fuel supply cost and power purchase agreement, renewable electricity tax credits, electric energy market prices

- Environmental assessment: water quality/quantity issues, air quality issues and estimated reductions in air quality impacts, air quality monitoring, other permits and reviews, National Environmental Policy Act compliance
- Benefit assessment: jobs, air quality improvements, revenue, forest health and sustainability
- Preliminary system design
- Training and other tribal professional development planning
- Long-term operating and maintenance planning
- Business plan for implementation

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Otherwise known as Kerr Dam, the facility is located about five miles southwest of Polson. It encompasses a three-unit hydroelectric plant with the capacity to generate up to 194 megawatts of electricity. Currently, the Tribes have the opportunity to acquire the Kerr Project in 2015 under provisions in the current Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) license. The Tribes have given notice they are exercising the option to acquire the dam in 2015 and they will become the first Tribes in the nation to own and operate a major hydropower facility.

Ultimately, owning and operating Kerr Dam will be historic for the Tribes as they continue to maintain and manage important natural resources within the Flathead Reservation. For more information, please visit www.EnergyKeepersInc.com.

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