



# White Earth Land Recovery Project: Building a Tradition of Efficiency

By Kathleen McCarthy, U of M RSDP

A strong sense of community is important for members of the White Earth Indian Reservation, especially among the Elders. They value learning from each other and looking out for each other. One place they can achieve this is at the White Earth Land Recovery Project (WELRP). The project was founded with a mission to "facilitate recovery of the original land base of the White Earth Indian Reservation, while preserving and restoring traditional practices of sound land stewardship, language fluency, community development, and strengthening our spiritual and cultural heritage."

One way the project is strengthening community development while preserving their land is by helping people use less energy in their homes—energy that is ultimately powered by coal-fired power plants. Last year, John Shimek, Alternative Energy Organizer for WELRP, saw a need for a reduction in energy use for members of the White Earth Reservation, not only to reduce energy costs, but also to decrease the amount of power needed from power plants. His idea was to replace as many standard light bulbs as possible with energy-saving compact fluorescent bulbs (CFLs), while educating residents on the importance of energy efficiency. Shimek worked with local utilities and other organizations that were active in helping such communities.

Four different utility companies responded to his request and offered a range of different energy saving ideas. Itasca-Mantrap Utilities installed approximately 80 weatherization kits in local homes. The kits include window installations, car timers, caulking, and pipe wrapping—all important for winter weather in Minnesota. Ottertail Power performed energy audits on homes, offering suggestions on how residents could save energy. Clearwater-Polk and Wild Rice utilities offered rebates on the 200 compact fluorescent bulbs that were being installed.

Although there will not be formal evaluations of the project until six months after implementation, there has been a very positive response from the community already. They know the harm that coal-fired power plants cause to their rivers, lakes, and air. The Reservation is already getting clean energy from their wind turbine, and now community members are using CFLs and other measures to reduce the amount of energy they need.

*Learn more about the White Earth Land Recovery Project at [www.welrp.org](http://www.welrp.org).*



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- Minnesota Department of Commerce
- Blandin Foundation
- Minnesota Pollution Control Agency
- University of Minnesota Institute for Renewable Energy and the Environment
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