Xcel Energy ends use of coal at Bay Front biomass power plant in Ashland

ASHLAND, Wis. (Dec. 3, 2020)- For the first time in more than a century, Xcel Energy will no longer use coal as a backup fuel at its Bay Front biomass power plant in Ashland, Wis., as the last shovel of coal was burned in the plant’s boilers on Dec. 1.

“Xcel Energy has been committed to using renewable energy for decades and as a flex-fuel plant, Bay Front became the first power plant in the nation to burn waste wood beginning in the late 1970s,” said Mark Stoering, president, Xcel Energy-Wisconsin and Michigan. “Eliminating the use of coal at Bay Front continues that commitment and aligns with our goal to reduce carbon emissions 80% by 2030 from 2005 levels, and our vision to deliver 100% carbon-free electricity by 2050.”

Since 1979, Bay Front has burned more than 6 million tons of biomass, including sustainably harvested local waste wood. Over the years, Xcel Energy has made several technological improvements at Bay Front including an $18 million project in 2015 that improved the air quality and boiler control systems making it one of the cleanest biomass power plants in the nation. This advanced modernization project also reduced the need to use coal as a backup fuel at the plant. Moving forward, the company will use natural gas to serve as a back-up fuel to biomass if needed.

“In 2006, the plant operated on about 64% biomass and used about 48,600 tons of coal,” said Bay Front Plant Manager Dave Fulweber. “This year, we will operate on 98% biomass and use about 4,200 tons of coal. Beginning next year, we will no longer use coal and work closely with our local wood vendors and add more agriculture partners to operate on nearly 100% biomass.”

Through its purchase of biomass and related services, the plant has a $30 million annual economic impact on a six-county region around Ashland. The Bay Front power plant employs 34 full-time employees.

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About Xcel Energy

Xcel Energy (NASDAQ: XEL) provides the energy that powers millions of homes and businesses across eight Western and Midwestern states. With its Wisconsin headquarters in Eau Claire, the company is an industry leader in responsibly reducing carbon emissions and producing and delivering clean energy solutions from a variety of renewable sources at competitive prices. For more information, visit xcelenergy.com or follow us on Twitter and Facebook.