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Energy group kicks off five-state tour in Cedar Valley

By RC BALABAN, Courier Staff Writer

WATERLOO --- Seeing bicyclists riding along trails in the Cedar Valley isn't unusual. Seeing bicyclists who also will be in Minnesota, Wisconsin, Nebraska and South Dakota within the next week just might be.

The 2006 Green Bike Tour kicked off in Waterloo on Thursday. The group, which advocates renewable energy sources, also traveled to the Center for Energy and Environmental Education on the University of Northern Iowa campus. The tour traveled to Decorah on Thursday night.

David Osterberg, with the Iowa Policy Project, said one of the most enjoyable aspects of the trip is getting to meet with people who are taking personal steps toward less dependence on traditional energy sources.



The Green Bike Tour, an eight-day, five-state trek promoting renewable energy sources kicked off its tour in Waterloo and Cedar Falls on Thursday. The group traveled to Decorah later in the day.

RICK CHASE / Courier Staff Photographer

"What you find is exciting things are going on," Osterberg said. "Just because they're not going on at the national level does not mean that we're not doing something about renewable energy and energy efficiency."

Tom Cook, a professor at the University of Iowa, showed up at the tour stop wearing a blazer and tie. His point was that everyday commuters can still ride their bicycles to work.

"You don't have to be a Lance Armstrong to ride a bicycle," Cook said. "You can be an ordinary schmoo and still commute by bicycle and save a lot of pollution and be a little healthier."

The trip covers more than 1,200 miles, though the group does not bike the entire journey. The group travels to Wisconsin and Minnesota today and will visit South Dakota and Nebraska before ending its trek Thursday in Iowa City at the Conference of Engineers for a Sustainable World.

The group also discussed global warming as part of its tour stop. According to a study by the Iowa Public Interest Research Group, the average temperature between 2000 and 2005 was above normal in 95 percent of locations across the United States. In Waterloo, the average temperature was 1.3 degrees above normal between 2000 and 2005, and 3.3 degrees above normal during the first six months of 2006.

"It's pretty compelling," said Nathaniel Baer, with Iowa PIRG.