

Wyoming: open spaces and energy  
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By KayCee Alameda

Wyoming and energy have been synonymous from the beginning, whether it be oil, natural gas, coal, uranium or the newly emerging energy, wind. During last Wednesday's Voices of the Valley speaker series, the topic was energy, but the focus was on wind development.

House District 47 Representative William "Jeb" Steward (R) said wind energy is one of the "more significant issues of our time" and commands an in depth look from the state of Wyoming. Temple Stevenson, Natural Resource Policy Advisor to Governor Dave Freudenthal, said that Wyoming is beginning to see a lot of new energy projects surface, aside from the wind farms.

Stevenson said there are 397 oil and gas companies still in Wyoming, with nearly 40,000 wells currently in operation. She added that uranium is being looked at on a larger scale, while coal is still in average, and somewhat increased, production within the state. Stevenson said several new state statutes have emerged concerning wind energy development. These statutes include: regulations for county commissions to regulate wind energy development within their respective counties; the Industrial Citing Act, which will determine the impacts of wind development on many facets; limited use of eminent domain with regard to collector power lines; and a \$1-per-megawatt-hour excise tax on the wind energy developed within Wyoming.

Stevenson said transmission lines are becoming a huge factor for the wind industry, as there are often no pathways available for the lines.

Patrick Madigan, 31-year veteran of public lands management (BLM), told the group that much energy development is taking place on public lands. "These public lands belong to you and your input is very valuable as to what happens on these lands," Madigan said.

Madigan said 76 wind energy development companies have filed applications to test possible sites for wind potency. He added that along with the wind studies, the companies must talk to private landowners with adjacent land, as well as have a plan for the transmission lines to get the electricity to a market.

Madigan said the BLM oversees all of the environmental impact studies (EIS) and assessments (EA) done by these private companies. The public comment period (of the EIS and EA) is one of the more important pieces of the wind development studies, Madigan reiterated. Madigan told the group that wind energy development is "coming and 35 applications (of the 76) have been approved with 16 in the process."

Roxane Perruso, Vice President and General Counsel for Power Company of Wyoming (PCW), discussed the proposed 1000 turbine wind farm which will be located on the

315,000 acre Overland Trail ranch, north and west of Saratoga. Perruso told the group that PCW had applied to the BLM in 2007 to study the wind on the public land of the Overland Trail ranch.

“It turns out that some of the best winds in the state are on the Overland Trail ranch, and we plan on using a mere 100,000 acres of the ranch,” Perruso stated. “We will have a draft EIS sometime this summer, and it will be at least another year before we get BLM’s record of decision.”

Perruso said PCW’s goal has always been to develop in an environmentally and economically way, that will not only be “beneficial for the company but for the communities of Carbon County.”

“We plan to provide jobs that will generate revenue and keep young people in (Wyoming) the state that they love,” Perruso added. With the proposed wind farm and its 114 permanent jobs, at full production, Perruso said PCW would be one of the top employers in the county.

Fred Lindzey, Wyoming Game and Fish Commissioner, told the audience that the game and fish commission creates policy concerning wildlife and energy development.

“We are ensuring that our kids and grandkids in the state of Wyoming have the same wildlife advantages that we enjoy,” Lindzey added. “Habitat, and the influence that all the proposed energy production has on that habitat, is of great interest to the game and fish.”

Lindzey told the audience that the game and fish learned a lot with oil and gas production because they had to manage the wildlife after the decision to produce had been made. He went on to say the game and fish department is allowed to comment, and even has a new document containing recommendations for wind development, before the turbines are ever placed on the landscape.

“We hope to help guide wind development in a way to best protect wildlife,” Lindzey said.

University of Wyoming’s energy extension coordinator, Milton Geiger, explained that he is interested in the alternative ways a community can provide their own sustaining power as well as reducing their electrical needs.

“The first thing that people need to do is reduce their energy consumption, this is as simple as replacing old appliances or an old pump on an irrigation system,” Geiger said. He said although there are various ways to produce individual electricity, Carbon Power and Light (CP&L) is the community power resource and “must be part of the discussion.” Geiger explained the “community wind piggy back effect” which is a community buy in from a large wind farm project.

“We wouldn’t mind looking at a turbine if it is making money for us,” Geiger said about the community buy in philosophy.

Another form of potential energy for the Platte Valley is biomass (wood waste fuel), which Geiger said has challenges and drawbacks due to the economics of removal of the dead wood. However, he said that a program called Fuels for Schools is a way to heat an entire school building using primarily woody biomass.

Geiger said small hydroelectric projects are also an option in the Platte Valley, and more feasible as the hydro electricity matches the current CP&L utility loads.

Finally, Geiger said the most effective and efficient way to produce power is by utilizing a geothermal heat pump. He explained, geothermal heat pump or ground source heat pump (GSHP) is a central heating and/or cooling system that pumps heat to or from the ground. “These pumps are cost effective, 300 to 400 percent effective and are a renewable resource,” Geiger expounded.

During the questions and answer period of the event, many quizzed the panel as to why Wyoming has to suffer the “viewscape” issues of the wind farms, while the power is being shipped west.

Perruso told the audience how the power market is outside of Wyoming, but the local economic benefits of the proposed wind development would be great. “We hope to create a supply chain which will create jobs and benefit all of the communities involved,” Perruso said.

Following several wildlife and bird questions, concerning the effect of the turbines on these animals, Lindzey simply stated, “we do not yet know how animals and bird will react to these generators.” He went on to say that, “setbacks” were in place for most species and the game and fish will be extremely involved with the construction and production phase of every wind farm in Wyoming.

Chuck Larsen, general manager of CP&L, stood to address questions concerning the use of the old boiler at the Saratoga Mill site.

“We have to find a way to produce power that is cost-effective for our members of CP&L, and using that boiler or attempting to utilize the beetle trees (biomass) are not,” Larsen said. He added, CP&L is looking at re-opening the Saratoga Mill to contain a biomass generator, plus to produce cut lumber.

“The department of energy is currently doing a feasibility study on the Mill, so we are in the very small start up stages of actually doing this,” Larsen pointed out.

Finally, the wind turbine decommission question was asked with regard to an exit strategy of the proposed wind farms in Carbon County.

Perusso said PCW has a plan to decommission the turbines, stating that each turbine is bonded and will be removed if the need arises.