

Company proposes larger, but less, wind turbines on White Mountain

Bigger is better?

By JEFF GEARINO - Southwest Wyoming bureau | Posted: Friday, February 26, 2010 12:15 am |



The wind turbines in the Bridger Valley, as seen in this 2005 photo, were built by Lehi, Utah-based Tasco Engineering, Inc., the same company seeking to build turbines on White Mountain near Rock Springs. (Jeff Gearino/Star-Tribune)

ROCK SPRINGS -- The developer of a proposed wind farm on White Mountain has scaled back the probable number of wind turbines in favor of a larger turbine size for the project.

If fully built, as few as 185 wind turbines could be constructed on scenic White Mountain instead of the 237 under study by federal administrators, company officials said Wednesday night during a public meeting.

The Bureau of Land Management released its environmental assessment this week for the proposed White Mountain Wind Energy Project.

The document noted that the final turbine selection process would depend on numerous factors including size, availability and economics.

Teton Wind LLC and White Mountain Wind LLC -- both subsidiaries of Lehi, Utah-based Tasco Engineering, Inc. -- are seeking federal approval to build up to 240 wind turbines within a total project area of about 20 square miles atop White Mountain.

The project -- more than a decade in the making -- would be constructed on private lands owned by the Rock Springs Grazing Association and Anadarko, state lands and BLM lands.

Gary Tassainer, president of Tasco, said the company hopes to use newer, taller and more energy-efficient wind turbines for the project. The hub of the turbine will stand 80 meters above ground.

"With new technology, turbines are getting larger ... our space requirements have changed," Tassainer told residents. "Instead of the 237 we've asked for ... it will probably be 185 to 200 turbines with full build-out now."

PacifiCorp agreement

Tasco is spearheading the county's first substantial wind energy project after successfully building several wind development projects in neighboring Uinta County in recent years.

The White Mountain project includes 8,527 acres of private land and 4,398 acres of public land. Officials said 70 of the proposed turbines are located on BLM land.

Project costs could reach as high as \$200 million depending on the final number of turbines constructed. If costs top \$170 million, it could trigger a project review by the Wyoming Industrial Siting Council.

The project would be built in four phases, according to plans.

The first phase would include 36 turbines approved by Sweetwater County in 2008 and the 70 turbines located on BLM land.

"We estimate the first phase would cost around \$140 million," Tassainer said.

Tassainer said Teton Wind is currently working on a purchase agreement to sell 50 megawatts of power to PacifiCorp., which he said could start construction of the first phase on private land.

The electricity would move through an existing 230-kilowatt power line that already runs along the top of White Mountain.

"There will be some trickle (of power) that comes into Rock Springs," Tassainer said. "That power will be used here as much as it can be. You'll see the benefit as your needs grow."

He estimated the project would bring up to 249 part-time and full-time jobs during the construction phase.

Employment during the project's estimated 20-30 year operational life would be about 80 direct and secondary jobs. Tasco officials estimated approximately \$55 million in property taxes would be raised during the life of the project.

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