

# Carbon County wind farm gets permit

By RICHARD HODGES

Star-Tribune correspondent

Wednesday, February 13, 2008 2:06 AM MST

SARATOGA -- Wyoming's largest electrical utility last week received a state Industrial Siting Council permit for a planned wind farm in Carbon County, but not before the council heard some serious concerns about the impacts of the construction project.

Approval of the Seven Mile Hill wind project, located between Medicine Bow and Hanna, included a late filing by PacifiCorp Energy to expand the project from 66 turbines to 79.

Although no one was opposed to the project during last week's council hearing, several local officials expressed concern about the adequacy of PacifiCorp's plans for housing workers, provision of emergency services during construction, and disposal of trash generated by the project. Also of concern were road access to the project and drive times to the site.

Among those with concerns were Carbon County Commission Chairman Terry Weickum, County Attorney Cindy DeLancey, road and bridge Superintendent Bill Nation, Hanna town attorney Peggy Trent, and Tom Thompson, attorney for the High Country Joint Powers Board, which supervises the public landfill near Hanna.

PacifiCorp attorney Mary Thorne said the general contractor for the project, Tetra Tech, is obligated to provide housing for the project. Several questions were asked of Tetra Tech and PacifiCorp representatives concerning the specifics of the housing plan, as they had testified that most of their workers would be coming in for this project.

This project is expected to be completed by December, with the bulk of the workers expected during the summer. The permit application noted that up to 166 workers might rent rooms at motels in the region, which includes Rawlins, Laramie and Casper. There are 5,150 motel rooms in the Weickum noted that a survey conducted for the application didn't determine how many of those rooms aren't being rented already.

Thorne noted that a delay in a planned coal-to-liquids plant near Medicine Bow -- expected to bring hundreds of construction workers to the area -- should help with wind farm worker housing.

Weickum acknowledged that "166 people is more manageable" than the large number expected for the coal-to-liquids plant, but "all of them in one room is not going to work."

David Bublitz, senior project manager for Tetra Tech, said many workers will likely bring their own housing in the form of RVs.

"These are professional workers who come prepared to live in these remote locations," he said. "This project is better because (potential) RV sites are relatively close."

In an effort to allay the fears expressed by council member Jim Miller of "an RV behind every sagebrush," PacifiCorp Vice President for Renewable Resource Acquisition Mark Tallman, assured the council that, "In the event that Tetra Tech fails in their plan to provide the necessary temporary housing, PacifiCorp is prepared to step in and fulfill the need."

PacifiCorp Project Manager Pam Jackson said later in the meeting that PacifiCorp remains committed to solving the housing problem for this project and would "provide transportation for workers if housing is out of

the area.” In a worst-case scenario, “PacifiCorp will provide temporary housing (for the workers) at another wind project site near Glenrock,” some two hours away.

That brought a clearly negative response from members of the audience. Several witnesses and council members expressed concern about any commute times over one hour.

Another concern raised by local officials was how much trash and waste would be generated during the construction and later during operations. The landfill for the area is located near Hanna, and it is reaching the end of its life expectancy and space is limited, according to Thompson, who represents the High Country Joint Powers Board that operates the landfill.

He raised concern about the volume of waste that would be generated by the project and the landfill’s ability to handle it, as it is expected to change from a landfill to just a transfer station by 2009.

Bublitz assured the council that there would not be much waste. When pressed, said possibly a 20-yard slide-off Dumpster would be needed during construction and an 8-yard Dumpster in the area where the office trailers will be located.

A third reason the project creates “heartburn” for Weickum is the limited availability of emergency services in the northeastern portion of Carbon County where it is being built. Council member Sandy Shuptrine was also concerned about the “availability of emergency services in that remote location.”

Weickum said the nearest ambulance to the project site is one recently stationed in Elk Mountain by the Carbon County Hospital. It is some 30 miles from the project site and is staffed full time only during the daytime and by volunteers from Hanna and Elk Mountain at night.

According to the application and testimony given during the hearing, neither PacifiCorp nor Tetra Tech plans to station an ambulance at the job site.

After hours of sometimes heated questions, which at one point caused PacifiCorp’s attorney to complain that Hanna’s attorney was harassing a company witness, all the local parties agreed that the project would be good for the county.

“It is a great project, and I am glad they are putting it in our county,” Weickum said.