

Lawmakers grapple with wind power regs

By MARJORIE KORN
Associated Press writer
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CHEYENNE -- Wyoming lawmakers have begun considering whether state or local governments -- or both -- should regulate wind power developments in the state.

The Senate corporations committee on Thursday approved a resolution that encourages counties to incorporate wind energy development into their land-use plans and other regulations -- if they haven't already.

House Speaker Colin Simpson, R-Cody, who sponsored the joint resolution, said counties should consider regulations that anticipate the long-term effects of an expanding wind energy industry.

"There will be state impacts and there will certainly be county impacts," Simpson said. He said the resolution tells counties, "We suggest you pay close attention to this."

The committee was apprehensive to approve the resolution because the original language in the bill seemed to suggest regulation authority would go to counties. No one on the committee would second a vote on the legislation until the bill was amended to say counties would have significant authority, leaving room for state oversight.

The resolution underscores a larger question: Should wind energy laws come from the state legislature or counties?

Larry Wolfe of the Wyoming Power Producers Coalition said it is a challenge to create statewide regulations that fit all of Wyoming, but counties may create too diverse a patchwork of rules and regulations.

Wolfe gave the example of a landowner whose property straddles two counties. He said regulatory authority could be murky if those two counties have different rules overseeing wind turbines.

"Wind power has become this large issue for the state and the state policy makers haven't had the discussion amongst themselves as to how these projects are regulated," Wolfe said.

The resolution will next be considered by the full Senate.