

Pipeline Authority looks at gas storage

By Tim Monroe

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CASPER — The subject of underground natural gas storage occupied the meeting of the Wyoming Pipeline Authority today. Representatives of several companies either operating or planning gas storage facilities in the Rocky Mountains talked about their opportunities and how they hope to work with wind generation projects.

The authority hopes to see pipeline expansion leading to and from underground storage facilities to new gas-fired electricity generating stations with wind farms connected. The gas-fired power stations would provide peak power when wind velocities decrease.

The Baker Storage facility in southeast Montana is the nation's largest underground gas storage project. Mark Anderson of the Williston Basin Interstate Pipeline Co. said the facility has about 287 billion cubic feet of gas in the ground but "we've seen some serious withdrawals in the last several days" due to cold weather. Anderson said the company is undertaking enhancements that will raise storage capacity by drilling 20-40 new wells that will supplement 100 existing wells. New gas compression capacity will also be added.

Other companies told similar stories about their operations and expansion plans. An interesting phrase came into play when company representatives talked about co-locating wind farms and gas-fired generating stations. That phrase is "electron pollution." It refers to the potential loss of wind farm tax credits if the gas-fired plants are not separated.

Brian Jeffries, executive director of the authority, said the authority will run down more information on electron pollution and eventually talk to Wyoming's Congressional delegation if corrective legislation is needed. He also said the authority will keep "pushing a dialogue with companies about pipelines, gas-fired generating stations and underground storage areas."