

RMP waivers on Gateway West route

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A crowd gathered at the July 9 Northern Laramie Range Alliance (NLRA) meeting let out a seemingly relieved ovation as Rocky Mountain Power President Richard Walje voiced second thoughts about the controversial 1e segments of his company's proposed Gateway West Transmission Line.

"It dawned on me that we probably did not do a good job of thinking about things in a socio-economic way," Walje described a change in outlook that occurred after he toured the Northern Laramie Range area. Walje also called the proposed 1e routes "probably not viable."

"Your voice has been heard by our company," Walje told the crowd. "Our intention is to work with the Alliance and landowners...We're dedicated to making the best of the situation."

Walje also said the new Waxman-Markey energy legislation may reduce the amount of capacity RMP will need to carry through the first segment of the Gateway West line, providing opportunities for different routing options.

"Our entire view of the future was turned around two weeks ago," Walje explained.

PacifiCorp (RMP's parent company) has joined with Idaho Power to construct the Gateway West line, which will include approximately 1,150 miles of new 500kv and 230kv transmission lines connecting the company's planned Windstar substation outside of Glenrock to a substation in Hemingway, Idaho. The first segment of the new transmission lines will run through Converse County from the Windstar substation near the Dave Johnston Power Plant to RMP's Aeolus substation outside of Medicine Bow. RMP plans for this segment of the transmission system to include four lines, three of which will run along an existing transmission corridor (1w) and augment the capacity of lines already in place and a fourth line constructed within a two mile wide corridor following a more eastern route, about 1.5 ridges west of Ft. Fetterman Road (1e). An alternate to the 1e corridor, which more closely follows Ft. Fetterman Rd. (1e(a)) has also been proposed.

"Things have moved so fast over the past few days. We've been for a while now looking at what other options we do have for the 1e route(s)," RMP spokesman Jeff Hymas said after the meeting. "Our hope is that we can avoid the Northern Laramie Range completely..I think from our perspective, we hope the message that we've conveyed to the Alliance is that we're continuing to look at all reasonable options and that we're considering some new alternates to help alleviate their concerns."

The proposed 1e and 1e(a) routes have caused significant controversy amongst landowners in the area as well as other concerned citizens and provided the original impetus for the creation of the NLRA.

RMP may open more options by scrapping their current plans to construct 500kv of capacity along 1w and simply build one line along the first segment of Gateway West, according to remarks made by RMP spokesman Jeff Hymas.

"The landscape today is different from when we first considered permitting for a 500kv line there," Hymas said. "While it made sense at the time the need for it is less now."

Hymas cited the Waxman-Markey legislation, the current economic situation and sage grouse issues for these changes in the "landscape."

Special Advisor to Governor Feudenthal Aaron Clark also expressed concerns about the 1e routes at the meeting after viewing a "very preliminary" administrative copy of the Bureau of Land Management's Draft Environmental Impact Survey (EIS) for the project.

"The route that's currently proposed for 1e will result in a whole lot of adverse environmental impacts that could be avoided by selecting a different route," Clark said. "The Governor's office is very pleased that RMP was listening to the public's concerns."

Lin Alder, a representative of the Utah-based company Wasatch Wind, attended the meeting as well and afterwards assured that the routing of Gateway West would not affect his company's interest in developing wind generation capacity in the Northern Laramie Mountain Range. Alder has said that Wasatch is considering a number of possible transmission options not tied to the Gateway West project or RMP.

The NLRA also opposes Wasatch's aspirations to build a wind farm in the Northern Laramie Mountains and many landowners have drawn associations between the proposal of RMP's Gateway West project and Wasatch Wind's interest in the area. The two companies have insisted that they are unrelated.

The NLRA formed in March after an early meeting between RMP and landowners in Glenrock who could potentially be affected by the construction of the Gateway West Transmission Line.

"The main objective of the (Northern Laramie Range Alliance) is that we want to successfully oppose both of these things," Kenneth Lay, one of the alliance's founding members, explained at an earlier meeting. "For anybody who's in favor of them, this probably isn't your group."

Diemer True, another founding member of the NLRA, reiterated Lay's comment at the outset of the July 9 meeting held in the Douglas High School Auditorium. In addition to Walje's remarks, the meeting featured a panel of speakers which included Senator Jim Anderson and Representative Jeb Steward (of Wyoming's Legislative Task Force on Wind Energy), Clark, Lay and True.

The NLRA hopes to hold another public meeting sometime in August and make a presentation before Wyoming's Legislative Task Force on wind energy at their August meeting.