

Residents remain cautious about White Mountain wind farm

By **JACK H. SMITH**
Staff Writer

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The proposed wind power project on the top of White Mountain has generated tremendous interest locally in wind energy. Local residents were able to hear a variety of view points on the topic last Wednesday, at a wind forum hosted by the Sweetwater County Commissioners.

Mark Kot, Sweetwater County Planning and Zoning Director, and organizer of the event, opened by saying this was neither a forum on the White Mountain project, or a public hearing.

Tassco Engineering of Utah, is proposing a 240-turbine wind farm outside of Rock Springs. Gary Tassiner, President of Tassco, was one of several the panel which also included Rock Springs Assistant City Attorney Richard Beckwith, Ken Clark of Rocky Mountain Power, Sweetwater County resident Robb Slaughter, moderator Al Harris, Carbon County Commissioner Terry Weickum, land owner John Hay and Wyoming Game and Fish Department employee Mark Zornes.

Clark, manager of Wind Development for Rocky Mountain Power, began the forum with a brief presentation on the benefits of wind energy.

Clark said PacifiCorp currently has 10 wind plants, with six of those being located in Wyoming, which is seventh in the nation in potential wind development.

According to Clark, rotors on wind turbines begin to turn in 7 mile per hour winds, and begin to generate power at 9 mph. Clark said rated power begins at 30 mph and a turbine running at 40 percent capacity generates enough power for the 467 houses.

Beckwith, representing the City of Rock Springs, said the city had several concerns about wind farms.

He discussed both concerns with the possibility of whether the wind energy may displace current 'fossil fuel' jobs and also concerns with quality of life, dealing with the towers in 'the line of site'.

Another concern noted by Beckwith was if the local community would be hooked into the grid from the wind turbines.

Tassiner spoke in detail about his proposed project and the benefits it would bring to Sweetwater County.

"This is a great opportunity," Tassiner said about the project.

So far, 36 wind turbines have currently been permitted by the county, and Tassiner said he is asking for a total of 70 for this phase of the project.

On a 20 year cycle, Tassiner said the project could bring in \$55.8 million in property taxes.

He added the project could also mean as many as 81 permanent jobs, 187 temporary jobs and internships with at the local college.

Along with the financial impact, Tassiner spoke in general terms of wind energy saying it is natural, domestic, clean, uses no water and would allow for huge reduction in air emissions.

As far as White Mountain, Tassiner said turbines on the rim could operate at 40 percent, which would be one of the best projects in the nation.

Zornes said the Wyoming Game and Fish Department has numerous concerns with wind energy.

The department knows it affects migratory birds, but Zornes said it does not know how it will affect sage grouse and big game species.

Another topic discussed by Zornes is roads that will have to be built for these projects. "There is going to have to be some major construction," Zornes said.

In his closing comments, Zornes recommended slowing down the process a little bit.

Slaughter, who sat on the panel as a resident, not as county treasurer, said residents need to get more informed and

involved with the potential pitfalls.

"We have the potential to be the victims of whatever happens in the future," Slaughter said.