

# Wind energy talk draws crowd

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By JOAN BARRON  
Star-Tribune capital bureau

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CHEYENNE -- A task force began a study Wednesday of what Gov. Dave Freudenthal described as the "gold rush" of wind energy development.

Representatives of the governor's office, all affected state and federal agencies, industry and various conservation and landowner groups over-filled the large meeting room on the third floor of the Capitol Building for the organizational meeting.

Sen. Jim Anderson, R-Glenrock, was chosen chairman of the task force and Rep. Rodney Anderson, R-Pine Bluffs, was named vice chairman.

"We can't discuss wind without discussing transmission," Anderson said. "We will be careful to work on things that really matter."

He also said his constituents want to know what will come after wind power, such as industrialization.

Rep. Seth Carson, D-Laramie, said a lot of other states are ahead of Wyoming in dealing legislatively with wind energy.

"The number of people in the room show this is an important issue," Carson said. "This is an economy that can get us through the boom-and-bust cycles."

Rep. Tim Stubson, R-Casper, suggested a starting point would be to define the roles of the state and counties in regulating the wind industry.

Stubson said after the meeting that there was resistance to the study in the Legislature last winter on grounds the counties would take care of the issues through zoning.

During the meeting, Ed Warren, a Converse County commissioner and chairman of the state County Commissioners' Association, said he believes most counties have some regulation of land use. But Converse County, he said, does not have zoning, and without zoning counties must rely on the state for regulation of wind development.

Warren said the state organization of county commissioners developed three main questions: who does the regulating?; what is to be regulated?; and how will citizens, other than landowners, receive value (meaning revenue from taxes) through wind energy development?

Karyn Coppinger of Laramie, chairman of the Wyoming Power Producers Coalition, recommended the task force study transmission facilities and the impact of endangered species issues, such as the protection of the sage grouse.

Coppinger's group also recommended requiring competitive bidding for new wholesale electric power generation projects, and that the state apply its same business-friendly tax policies to wind energy.

The task force needs to consider the point of view of the landowners, said Bob Whitton of Wheatland, who added that he is trying to lease some of his land for a wind energy project.

"There are some people who are going to be walking out their door and looking at those things every day," he said of the wind energy facilities.

Laurie Goodman, representing a landowners' group, said landowners have been looking at wind energy development as an economic resource. But now they are restricted because of environmental consideration, such as protection of the core areas of sage grouse habitat.

After the meeting, Goodman said private landowners with transmission lines on their property should receive periodic payments rather than a one-time sum.

"When transmission lines are up, they're there forever," Goodman said. "These things are going to be criss-crossing Wyoming."

The continued payment would not hamper development because if companies balk at paying, they still could put the transmission lines on public lands, Goodman said.

She noted the state is also facing wind energy development on its public lands without receiving any royalties from the companies.

In that respect the state and the landowners are in the same position, she said.

The task force will meet Aug. 25 in Casper for a tour of the Rocky Mountain Power wind farm at Glenrock. On Aug. 26 and 27, the group will hear reports on existing regulations governing wind energy and other resources and will discuss recommendations from the various interest groups.

Freudenthal, in a letter to Sen. Jim Anderson, wrote that Wyoming "stands at the headwaters of two entirely divergent courses: one that leads to promise and the other that threatens our way of life."

While this may seem melodramatic to some -- we in Wyoming know and respect the razor s edge on which we are precariously balanced relative to sage grouse and other sensitive wildlife species, our economic sustainability and private property rights," the letter added.

Freudenthal cited four areas of concern:

- Conservation of sage grouse and other sensitive species.
- Shifting the burden to developers to show they will do no harm in core habitat areas before they can obtain authorization from state agencies, such as the Industrial Siting Administration .
- Ensure that state and local governments are informed on what tax revenues generated by wind energy they will receive.
- Look at the impacts of wind generation, particularly transmission lines, on private property rights.

*Contact capital bureau reporter Joan Barron at 307-632-1244 or joan.barron@trib.com*