

Wind farm doubles

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A PacifiCorp project to construct a 66-turbine, 99-megawatt wind farm has doubled since original plans were announced in July. Meanwhile, the company's plans for coal-related power plants were scrapped this week.

In addition to the first wind farm plan, the company has a second 66-turbine project planned and a potential third project in its sights, all located in the area 12 miles north of Glenrock at the former Dave Johnston coal mine. The first is referred to as the Glenrock project and the second is the Rolling Hills project.

PacifiCorp, which operates as Rocky Mountain Power in Wyoming, has laid aside plans for three benchmark coal based projects, the 527-megawatt Jim Bridger power plant in Sweetwater County among them. The coal-gasification, carbon capture and sequestration demonstration project in partnership with the state of Wyoming at the Bridger plant have been pushed aside too, PacifiCorp spokesman Jeff Hymas said, along with plans for a plant in Utah.

"They're no longer viable," Hymas said. He cited a number of reasons for the change in company plans. Chief among them, is the expected legislation the federal government will enact as it attempts to curb climate change.

As it turns to greener power generation technologies, PacifiCorp will begin construction on the Glenrock and Rolling Hills wind farm projects by spring of 2008. Both farms should be completed by the end of next year, Hymas said, while construction on the third wind farm would begin sometime thereafter.

The expansion also coincides with PacifiCorp's plan to generate at least 2,000 mega watts of renewable energy in the company's resource mix by the year 2013 - about 20 percent of the company's overall total. Combined, the Glenrock and Rolling Hills projects, which will cost \$400 million to construct, would produce nearly 200 megawatts of power per year.

The increase in renewable energy projects is one of a number of options PacifiCorp is exploring to help bridge the gap created by the shelving of its coal projects.

MidAmerican Energy Holdings Company, corporate owner of PacifiCorp, is exploring nuclear development in Idaho, but wouldn't comment on further nuclear development possibilities, Hymas said.

"The (energy) gap will need to be filled," he said.

PacifiCorp recognized the Dave Johnston plant as an ideal location for expanding as soon as they announced plans for the original Glenrock farm.

"We knew when we announced the (original) Glenrock project there was potential for other wind projects on the property," Hymas said. "We knew (it) was a good location for wind strength and availability, and it's also located close to existing transmissions."

PacifiCorp already owning the land played a roll in the decision as well. "It's an excellent location," he said.

Scrapping the coal-based projects shouldn't hit Wyoming economically. The proposals were possibilities under the company's Request For Proposals for the 2012-14 time line. Plants were not under construction, and jobs weren't lost, Hymas said.

But doubling, perhaps tripling PacifiCorp's wind farm plans could impact Converse County in many ways.

About 187 workers are expected during the nine-month construction phase. Fifteen full-time employees, including computer technicians, engineers and maintenance crews will operate both projects once they are

completed, Hymas said.

“Hopefully that will include as many local workers as possible,” he said.

Housing the workers during the construction months will be difficult in a county already pressed for available housing, he admitted, but motels around Glenrock and Douglas, combined with temporary living facilities at Dave Johnston if the situation calls for it, should provide enough places to overnight.

Converse County could also be on the receiving end of substantial impact fees, according to recent conversation at county commission meetings. The fees are intended to aid towns and counties directly affected by the wear and tear of such large scale operations.

Converse County Commission Chairman Jim Willox said local officials are aware of the planned increase in the wind farm projects as well as the end-of-December deadline that has been established for commissioners to submit their suggestions.

“We’re going to keep working with Douglas, Glenrock and Rolling Hills,” Willox said about the upcoming deadline. “(The increase in construction) doesn’t change what’s going to be impacted, it changes to what degree it’s going to be impacted.”

In addition to the Converse County projects, PacifiCorp has plans to construct another wind farm, called the Seven-Mile Hill project, near Medicine Bow.