

Wind farm goes up for vote

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Tuesday, June 30, 2009 8:09 AM MDT

ROCK SPRINGS -- Wind power development in southwest Wyoming could get a big boost tonight from the Sweetwater County Commission.

The three-member board will meet at 5:30 p.m. in Rock Springs City Hall to gather public comments -- and possibly vote on -- a proposal by a Utah wind developer to build 237 wind turbines on White Mountain.

Tasco Engineering Inc. of Lehi is spearheading the county's first substantial wind energy project. The company is seeking a conditional use permit from the county for its White Mountain Wind Farm Project.

The firm has incorporated two limited liability companies -- Teton Wind and White Mountain Wind -- to develop the \$200 million wind project. The project site includes federal public rangelands and some private lands owned by the Rock Springs Grazing Association.

Tasco was granted a conditional use permit from the county in the summer of 2008 to construct 36 wind turbines on top of White Mountain in the first phase of the project, at a cost of about \$100 million. The second phase will involve construction of an additional 69 turbines on the mountain, with a possible maximum build-out of 237 turbines, according to company plans.

White Mountain is a popular recreation area that lies northwest of Rock Springs and northeast of the city of Green River, just north of Interstate 80.

The proposed wind farm site is near the scenic landmark called Pilot Butte and the county's recently completed Wild Horse Loop Tour, which runs along the slope of White Mountain.

Wind developers such as Tasco have been exploring sites across Sweetwater County in recent years, looking to take advantage of southwest Wyoming's vast, but still mostly undeveloped wind resource.

Wyoming ranks 12th in the nation for its wind energy production, according to U.S. Department of Energy statistics. American Wind Energy Association officials believe the state has only developed about 1 percent of its potential wind capacity.

The association said Wyoming's existing wind farms have a capacity of 775 megawatts. A megawatt is enough electricity to power about 225 to 300 households.

Tasco officials estimate the 237 wind turbines could generate up to 350 megawatts of electricity. The electricity would move through an existing 230-kilowatt power line that already runs along the top of White Mountain.

The firm has 20-year fixed contracts in place, according to Tasco officials, to sell the power generated from the White Mountain project, including an agreement with PacifiCorp for 80 megawatts of wind-generated electricity.

Industrial siting

Tasco and partner Tri-Lateral Energy LLC recently completed the construction of 28 wind turbines on the Bridger Butte and Bigelow Bench areas of Bridger Valley in neighboring Uinta County.

A second project phase is under way that will add another 38 turbines to the Bridger Butte project.

Company officials said at a public meeting last December that Sweetwater County local governments should reap many benefits from the White Mountain project.

Those benefits include more power for local consumers, reductions in air emissions from coal- and gas-fired power plants, and jobs and earnings during construction and post-construction that could total as high as \$17 million.

The company has filed a permit application with the Wyoming Industrial Siting Council for the White Mountain project.

According to state law, any industrial project with a price tag of \$170 million or more triggers an automatic review of the socioeconomic and environmental impacts of the project by the council.

Faced with growing interest from the region's wind developers three years ago, Sweetwater County commissioners decided in 2006 to develop rules and regulations governing wind farms in the county.

The county now operates under a conditional use permitting process that requires an environmental assessment of any proposed wind energy project, even if the project is fully located on private lands.

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