

Wind farm on horizon near Glenrock

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Plans are marching forward toward construction of a wind farm near Glenrock. While Rocky Mountain Power navigates the regulatory approval process, the Converse County commissioners are looking at possible impacts.

Rocky Mountain Power in July announced its plan to use part of the reclaimed Glenrock coal mine as the site for a new 99-megawatt wind project.

The utility plans to locate 66 wind turbines in an area where more than 40 years of surface coal mining took place. The company requested a certificate of public convenience and necessity from the Wyoming Public Service Commission July 3 as part of its efforts to move the project forward.

“We are pleased to announce plans for a new Wyoming wind energy facility that will benefit customers by adding new cost-effective renewable energy to our electrical system, as part of a comprehensive strategy to achieve a more balanced mix of resources used to generate electricity,” said Richard Walje, president of Rocky Mountain Power.

Located approximately 12 miles north of Glenrock the former Dave Johnston Coal Mine operated from 1958 to 2000, supplying the primary source of fuel for the company’s nearby Dave Johnston Power Plant. Approximately 104 million tons of coal were mined during this period. Commonly referred to as the Glenrock Mine, it was the second surface coal mine developed in the mineral-rich Powder River Basin.

According to Rocky Mountain Power, full-scale final reclamation efforts to restore the nearly nine-mile stretch of land began in 1999, and reclamation work was completed in late 2005.

As part of the wind farm approval process, concerns, questions and information on the proposed project were scheduled to be addressed to Nov. 7 in the Wyoming Public Service Commission’s hearing room in Cheyenne. However on Tuesday, the hearing was postponed by the PSC. No new date had been set as of Tuesday morning. No reason was given for the delay.

Rocky Mountain Power is filing an application for an industrial siting permit which would allow the first phase of construction.

Tom Schroeder, program principal for the Environmental Quality Industrial Siting Division, told the Converse County Commissioners recently Rocky Mountain Power is quickly moving ahead with the project, estimated for completion by October 2008.

The fast-moving project has the county commissioners eager to address how much impact money will come in as a result.

Impact assistance payments, issued through the state Department of Environmental Quality’s industrial siting division, are intended to help communities address needs that come with large-scale labor and construction.

The Wyoming Legislature exempted alternative energy projects from paying sales tax, Douglas City Administrator Bobbe Fitzhugh explained. The impact fees would help offset the loss of tax revenue to local governments, she said.

Schroeder said the commissioners should start discussing and identifying potential impacts surrounding cities and towns will endure.

How the money is divided up is left to the county, which should serve all municipalities affected by the project, Schroeder explained, but the state can use its own formula should an agreement not be reached.

“That’s going to be the big issue,” Commissioner Ed Werner said. “How do you split the pie?”

Glenrock, Rolling Hills, Douglas and even some of Natrona County may be impacted from additional construction workers arriving in the area.

“If we need to reach an agreement, to get this thing rubber stamped, we need Natrona and Casper on board,” County Commission Chairman Jim Willox said.

“We may be the only instance where there are no impact dollars,” CANDO Director Joe Coyne explained. “(Douglas and Glenrock’s) economy may have peaked . . . If it continues to decline while these are being constructed, the formula will yield no impact fees, even though there’s a real impact, because we had such a strong economy during the base period. That’s a real possibility here with this project.”

Evansville and Casper may be impacted immediately as Rocky Mountain Power has discussed off-loading materials and trucking them from there to the site. Also, Schroeder pointed out up to 150 workers could be needed to work on the project.

“And we’re still going to see the impact of all the work involved,” Werner added.

“If the impact exceeds the value of the project, we don’t want it,” Werner said.

Willox said a lot needs to be taken into consideration as the project moves forward.

“One of the biggest impacts is where are the 100-150 workers going to land?” Werner rhetorically asked.

Living quarters, off loading and the toll of a repeated commute with heavy machinery on the roads are the major concerns facing the commissioners.

“One hundred fifty workers hitting Glenrock is huge,” he said.