

## Wind talkers: Symposium covers laws, taxes, transmission



Gov. Dave Freudenthal addresses the crowd of approximately 600 people Thursday at the first Wyoming Wind Energy Symposium at the University of Wyoming in Laramie. (Courtesy/University of Wyoming)

By MATT JOYCE  
Associated Press writer  
Thursday, August 13, 2009 8:28 PM MDT

LARAMIE -- Developers say three of the biggest road blocks to constructing wind farms in Wyoming are uncertainty over transmission infrastructure, government regulation and taxes - all topics examined at a state conference Thursday.

Gov. Dave Freudenthal's Wind Energy Symposium began with a day of wide-ranging discussion of Wyoming's burgeoning wind industry and the challenges and benefits it poses for the state's economy and environment. About 20 wind farms are operating in Wyoming, and government officials say another 40 are currently under development.

Freudenthal opened the conference with a call for balance in Wyoming's approach to accommodate private property rights, private sector development, the state's economy and government's revenue needs. He also urged the industry to provide jobs that will benefit the state in the long run.

"We really do know what we want," Freudenthal said. "We want good jobs, we want good time for vacation, we want a place to vacation, we want a place for our kids and we want to pass it on to the next generation."

Wyoming has time to address questions surrounding wind development because the existing transmission system has little room to export more power from the state. Developers have proposed six major transmission lines to carry Wyoming power to the south and west, but those are at least five to 10 years away from operation, according to the Wyoming Infrastructure Authority.

As transmission companies push their plans forward, wind farm developers say the missing transmission link hampers their progress; they don't want to build wind farms that sit idle waiting for transmission.

Mark Stacy of Iberdrola Renewables, said evolving regulatory policies also complicate planning for wind farms. Just as the state is tackling regulatory concerns, so are individual counties, he said, and unexpected rules can be a serious blow to a project.

"I like all the talk about wind energy and all the interest in wind energy," Stacy said. "It just creates a period, while these things are getting hammered out, where there's uncertainty."

Stacy, Iberdrola's Rocky Mountain director for wind development, said uncertainty over future state taxes on wind development is also problematic. The Wyoming Legislature recently accelerated the sunset of a sales tax exemption for certain renewable energy projects, and Stacy said he's heard discussion of a new generation tax.

A Wyoming legislative wind energy task force is studying the state's tax policy for wind energy.

"The wind resource in Wyoming compensates for some of that, and the lack of income tax compensates for some of that, but the taxes that are being considered right now would have a significant detrimental effect on development," Stacy said.

If the wind boom comes to fruition, where would it take place? Aaron Clark, an energy infrastructure adviser in the governor's office, said the most leasing and development activity is taking place from Rawlins east through Medicine Bow, Hannah and Rock River.

Clark said there's also activity in the area of southeast Fremont, southeast Natrona and northern Carbon counties; southwest Converse and northern Albany counties; northern Converse County; and near Rock Springs.

He said Platte, Goshen and northern Laramie counties are also ripe for wind development, but haven't gotten as much attention because they're farther away from electricity demand in states to the west. He said state government hopes to facilitate transmission access to the area, because its home to willing landowners and has minimal environmental conflicts.

"I think it would behoove wind developers in the state, as well as help the state push wind forward, if everybody who's interested in wind would really look hard at what kind of development opportunities exist east of I-25 and north of I-25 in the eastern part of the state," Clark said.