

Proposed transmission line over Commissary Ridge among hot-button topics

Wyoming governor holds final wind talk tonight

By JEFF GEARINO - Southwest Wyoming bureau | Posted: Thursday, June 17, 2010

GREEN RIVER -- Lincoln County's scenic Commissary Ridge lies at the southern end of the Bridger-Teton National Forest in southwest Wyoming.

Lots of rustic, summer homes dot the area, which doesn't even have electricity yet.

Several years ago, PacifiCorp and Idaho Power announced their ambitious, \$2 billion Gateway West Transmission Line Project, which will run across portions of Lincoln County.

County land managers quickly secured cooperating agency status in the federal permitting process, in part to ensure that Lincoln County's voice would be heard in the siting process.

But when federal officials announced their preferred route for the transmission line project in January, county officials were stunned.

Instead of following an existing transmission corridor that runs from the Jim Bridger Power Plant in neighboring Sweetwater County as the county had hoped, the proposed route ran right through Commissary Ridge.

Across the Cowboy State, cities and counties are facing the same conundrum as Lincoln County: how to modernize the state's electrical grid in order to harness all the emerging renewable energy resources such as wind power.

State lawmakers and various county officials have begun to struggle with new policies to make sure the development of wind energy and the siting of new transmission lines are balanced.

As part of that process, Lincoln County residents will get a chance to talk about the issues with Gov. Dave Freudenthal tonight in Kemmerer.

The governor will conduct the third of three "community discussions" about wind energy and electrical transmission lines in Wyoming.

The first discussion was held in Douglas in April and the second round was conducted in Wheatland in May.

"I'll be there to hear from people and to answer questions," Freudenthal said in a media release. "There is a lot happening with wind development in Wyoming and I want to hear what people want to say."

Freudenthal said people need to know where the state stands on a range of issues relating to wind power and electrical transmission, from sage grouse to property rights.

The governor said he wants to help lead a public discussion to establish a balanced approach to developing wind energy and siting transmission lines, just as the state has done with other energy resources.

"These are complicated subjects and folks are entitled to a straightforward conversation on what we can all agree are difficult, sometimes polarizing issues," Freudenthal said. "Some developers say Wyoming is anti-wind ... on the other hand, some property owners are concerned about private property rights in the face of wind-related development."

"Let's get together and talk about it."

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If you go

Gov. Dave Freudenthal will conduct his final "community conversation" on wind energy development and power transmission lines this evening in Kemmerer. The event is scheduled for 6 to 8 p.m. in the Kemmerer High School Auditorium.