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Elected officials want Rocky Mountain Power to invest more in rural Utah

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Rocky Mountain Power

FILE - The Rocky Mountain Power solar plant near Holden, Utah. Some rural state and county leaders are asking Utah's largest electric utility to put more of its money in areas with its biggest customer base. But Rocky Mountain Power officials say they're already doing just that.

SALT LAKE CITY — Some rural state and county leaders are asking Utah's largest electric utility to put more of its money in areas with its biggest customer base.

But Rocky Mountain Power officials say they're already doing just that.

A group of civic leaders this week sent a letter to Gov. Gary Herbert, calling on him to implore Rocky Mountain Power to redirect money they believe the utility is seeking to invest in Wyoming and Idaho toward projects in rural Utah. Those projects, they contend, could help bolster economically challenged areas of the state.

The letter cited the power company's request to state regulators in Idaho, Wyoming and Utah to approve an initial plan to significantly expand the amount of wind and solar power serving customers by 2020.

Critics contend that much of the proposed \$3.5 billion infrastructure improvements will be built in Wyoming, and some in Idaho, with the energy produced mostly going to Utah consumers.

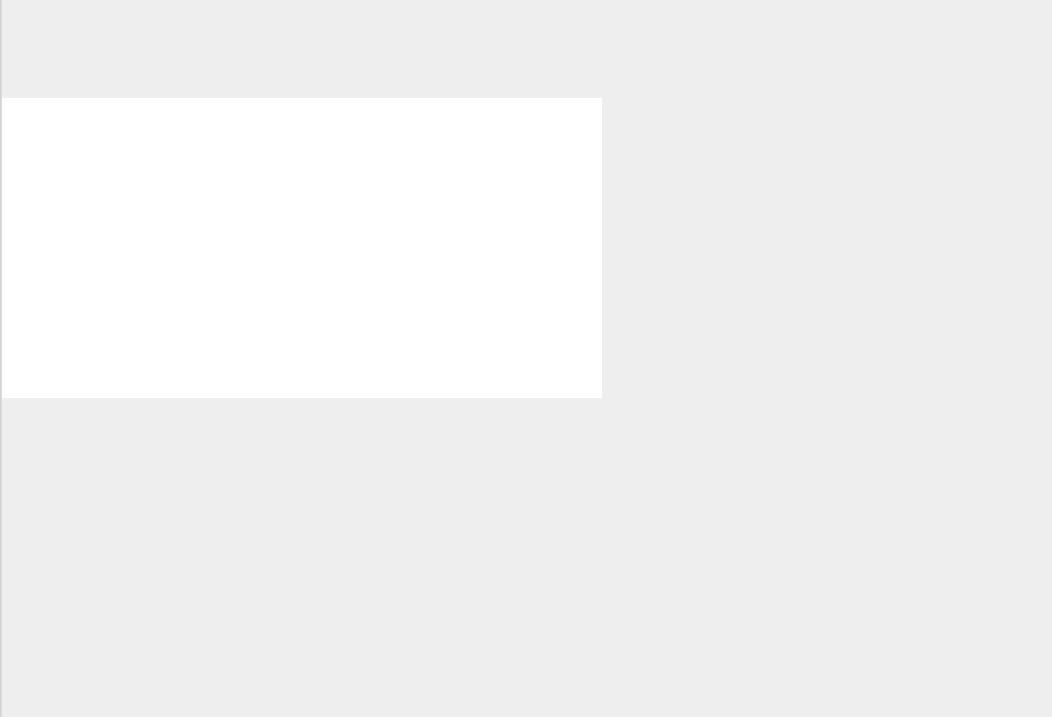
"Such an investment will produce millions in tax revenues and thousands of new jobs in Wyoming and Idaho, with Utah receiving only marginal economic benefit," the letter stated.

"That is why we are alarmed to learn that our state-regulated electric utility is seeking to divert Utah-generated resources to benefit other states, when Utah is so perfectly positioned to fully deploy that same investment and development here at home."

The letter also mentioned Herbert's pledge to create 25,000 new


jobs in Utah's 25 rural counties. Box Elder County Commissioner Stan Summers said several rural counties would be ideal sites for a wind and solar transmission infrastructure development project.

"It would be a good thing for (those counties) and their economies," Summers said. "I'd like to see it happen in any of these rural counties that are being shut down by the reduction in coal production (and the like)."



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Being able to help rural communities grow and offer residents economic opportunities, he said, is something they've been lacking for so long.

"If they are going to produce the energy to bring back here and transmit through here to go elsewhere, shouldn't we be able to be a part of that somehow?" Summers queried.

In April, Rocky Mountain Power unveiled a 20-year plan to provide electricity to its customers by adding more solar and wind generation, and making existing wind turbines more efficient. The \$3.5 billion plan also incorporates building a segment of the Gateway West transmission line to facilitate the wind expansion.

The project would upgrade, or “repower,” the company’s existing wind fleet with longer blades and newer technology, add around 1,100 megawatts of new wind, and build a new 140-mile Gateway West transmission segment.

“This plan provides more diversity in the energy we use, which helps us keep electricity prices low for customers and improves the economies of our states,” said Rocky Mountain Power President and CEO Cindy Crane. “These investments will provide significant long-term benefits to our customers and bring substantial economic benefits to rural communities where the facilities will be located.”

Rocky Mountain Power spokesman Dave Eskelsen said civic leaders may misunderstand why the company is proposing to construct the wind and solar transmission lines in the areas that have been chosen. The main reason, he said, is because it makes the most logical sense.

"The wind resources are where they are because of where the wind blows," Eskelsen said. "You could not do the same thing (as effectively) in Utah that you could in Wyoming because the resource doesn't exist (to the same degree) in Utah."

By moving to complete the wind upgrades and developments by 2020, the company would be able to use federal production tax credits, which will help cover the cost of the investments and provide a net savings for customers over the life of the projects, he said.

However, the company has other considerations for developing substantial solar resources in the Beehive State in the years to

come, Eskelsen said.

"We have upwards of 1,000 megawatts of solar resources in our long-range planning," he said. "Seventy-seven percent of those will be located in Utah because that's where the resource is."

The utility does its best to develop resources in the place most suited for those particular power generation needs, Eskelsen said.

"It makes the most sense for all of our customers to locate those resources where the best resources exist," he said.



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