

Wyoming Renewable Energy Siting Collaborative

RECOMMENDATIONS TO STATE LEADERSHIP ON RENEWABLE ENERGY FACILITY SITING



Photo Credit Sue Jones

Introduction

Energy markets are changing to reflect a growing domestic demand for low-carbon energy supplies, including electricity generated by renewable resources. With strong wind and solar resource potential, Wyoming has an opportunity to participate in these markets by hosting new utility-scale wind and solar power plants. Wyoming also desires to continue to preserve its highly valued environmental resources. Assuming the renewable energy industry continues to grow in Wyoming, are there opportunities for the state to improve its leadership in how renewable energy is sited?

To discuss this and related questions, the Ruckelshaus Institute at the University of Wyoming convened a collaborative process to generate proactive policy recommendations for the State of Wyoming in siting future renewable energy projects. Invited participants in the Wyoming Renewable Energy Siting Collaborative represented a diverse range of stakeholders and interests, including private landowners and ranchers, wildlife and environmental organizations, renewable energy trade associations, individual project developers, and county governments. The goal of the collaborative was to provide and develop recommendations primarily for consideration by state leadership.

Members of the Wyoming Renewable Energy Siting Collaborative were:

- Chris Brown, Powering Up Wyoming
- John Burrows, Wyoming Outdoor Council
- Kara Choquette, Power Company of Wyoming
- Rod Fisher, Rocky Mountain Power
- Sue Jones, Wyoming County Commissioners Association
- Jen Lamb, The Nature Conservancy
- Jim Magagna, Wyoming Stock Growers Association
- Christine Mikell, Enyo Renewable Energy
- Travis McNiven, Consultant, McNiven Strategies

The group met nine times between December 2020 and July 2021. The objective was to seek broad agreements in principle, rather than focus on detailed recommendations, with the shared understanding that any formal regulatory or policy change would only be made via official state processes that include opportunity for public participation. The group's conversations covered several issues related to renewable energy in Wyoming including tax policy, federal/state revenue sharing, transmission development, supply-chain manufacturing, and other topics. The group also learned from and consulted with experts from the Wyoming Industrial Siting Division, the Wyoming Game and Fish Department, and the Wyoming Wildlife and Natural Resource Trust. In the end, the group decided to focus on recommendations specific to siting and permitting renewable energy generation facilities in Wyoming. All recommendations contained here were acceptable to all direct collaborative participants at this time. However, it is important to note that these recommendations may not reflect the diverse opinions of individual organization/association members beyond the direct collaborative participants.

Recommendations

Wind and solar energy projects in Wyoming are required to pass through an extensive regulatory siting and permitting regime as applicable at the federal, state, and county levels. (See the Wyoming solar and wind permitting guides available from the [Wyoming Energy Authority](#) for additional details.) The agencies and the regulations in place are intended to protect Wyoming's natural resources and public health and safety. The collaborative members agree there is room for Wyoming to improve aspects of siting and permitting renewable energy projects and to increase efficiency while conserving important natural habitats. The following recommendations are ways that Wyoming can show proactive leadership on the development of renewable energy by improving how the state sites and permits projects.



- 1 We recommend that state offices, the Wyoming Energy Authority, and the Wyoming Business Council establish clear and consistent messaging on renewables: Wyoming is pro-business and open to renewables as part of an “all of the above energy strategy” and committed to working with the industry to create new opportunities for businesses and host communities.
- 2 We recommend that private property rights be fundamentally respected, and that landowners be assured the right to develop their property in partnership with renewable energy in a manner that is consistent with government regulations.
- 3 We recommend that the state require a reasonable level of visual simulations be included by the project developer as part of the county or state permit process for all large industrial projects including wind and solar energy projects.
- 4 We recommend that the DEQ review its regulations for wind and solar at least every 10 years and consider updating them as industry standards and national research advances.
- 5 We recommend that the DEQ (in consultation with federal agencies and tapping federal funding opportunities) study the feasibility of brownfields and previously disturbed areas for development of renewable energy facilities.
- 6 We recommend working to streamline the existing process for renewable siting and permitting and remove process redundancies while also increasing access to information about development in the state to improve public transparency.
- 7 We recommend that the Governor continue to have state agencies engage closely with federal decision-makers for siting solar and wind energy projects on Wyoming's federally managed lands.
- 8 We recommend consultation with the Wyoming Game and Fish Department and the US Fish and Wildlife Service as early as possible, ideally as part of the site suitability/critical issues analysis.
- 9 We recommend that the state clearly describe its mitigation objectives and requirements for renewable energy to better inform developers, affected stakeholders, and the public about existing rules and measures.
- 10 We recommend that the Wyoming County Commissioners Association make available to counties any existing Wyoming county ordinances for siting and developing renewable energy infrastructure and facilities.