

# Wyoming Renewable Energy Siting Collaborative

Convened and Facilitated by the University of Wyoming Haub School of the Environment and Natural Resources, October 2020

## BACKGROUND

Wyoming is at a critical energy juncture where there is an urgent need and opportunity for state leadership to improve the existing siting process for large-scale renewables. The cost of new utility scale wind and solar has fallen to become comparable to traditional energy sources, the state's transmission capacity is expanding, and the energy landscape of the country is changing to reflect a growing domestic demand for clean low-carbon energy. The result is that the state is seeing a significant uptick in the number of new large-scale renewable energy projects in nearly a decade. Two important questions are whether this growth will continue and accelerate, and if so, under what conditions? Currently, the future of this development is unclear as Wyoming's regulatory environment for renewables remains highly uncertain for developers and utilities considering future investments, and recent controversial projects such as the Sweetwater Solar Project and the Tie Siding Wind Project have highlighted the need for the state to consider a more proactive approach to siting and permitting future development. Given this context, it has become increasingly clear that a collaborative approach toward the creation of a proactive policy framework for siting future renewable energy projects is important – if not fundamental – to accommodate the growth of renewables in Wyoming while minimizing their impact on other important Wyoming values.

## PURPOSE AND OUTCOMES

The purpose of the Wyoming Renewable Siting Collaborative is to provide recommendations to the Governor's Office, members of the Wyoming Legislature, local government leaders, and other decision makers for future policy consideration that will help Wyoming proactively guide large scale renewable projects to sites that protect Wyoming values, while also allowing the growth of this important economic sector. This process is designed to be efficient, and maintain a high-level focus on frameworks and guidelines while encouraging critical thinking and problem solving to improve the siting and permitting process for all parties at the table. Specifically, the collaborative will focus on the following outcomes:

- Agreements in principle for the use of incentives and other mechanisms to minimize future conflicts with wildlife and other resources.
- Agreements in principle on ways to make existing permitting and siting processes more efficient, streamlined, and capable of providing more certainty for project proponents.
- Productive dialogue and brainstorming of common interests between stakeholders.
- Actionable policy recommendations for short and longer term consideration for the Governor.
- Improved relationships and understanding of mutual interest among different stakeholder groups.

## PROCESS AND STAKEHOLDER PARTICIPATION

The Wyoming Outdoor Council began conducting background interviews for the start of a collaborative process in May 2020. During this process over 30 different stakeholders were contacted and interviewed on the topic of renewable energy siting. Based upon the interest and ability of different groups to participate and contribute to further dialogue, the Outdoor Council reached out to the Haub School / Ruckelshaus Institute to help convene and facilitate a collaborative process. The Haub School has agreed to invite and convene the following stakeholders to participate in the collaborative.

1. Wyoming Stock Growers Association

2. Wyoming County Commissioners Association
3. The Nature Conservancy
4. The Wyoming Outdoor Council
5. Rocky Mountain Power
6. NextEra Energy
7. American Wind Energy Association
8. Enyo Renewable Resources
9. Power Company of Wyoming

Additionally, representatives from the Wyoming Industrial Siting Council (ISC), Wyoming Game and Fish Department (WGFD), Wyoming Energy Authority (WEA), have been authorized to participate by the Governor's Office.

## **SESSION TOPICS AND TIMELINE**

Based upon the initial research the following topics are suggested for discussion over six virtual meetings starting in mid-November 2020 and running through the end of January 2021. Exact dates will be determined by the group and will last between 2-3 hours depending on the topic and discussion needs.

### **1. Introduction Session**

- *Introductions*
- *Agreement on timeline, process, and logistics, etc.*
- *Discussion of topics and agreement on problems and issues to be discussed.*

### **2. Wildlife Concerns for Siting**

- *Agreements in principle on ways to make the siting process more proactive to address wildlife concerns and ensure agency input early in the development process.*
- *Considerations for avian species, ungulate migration corridors, threatened and endangered species, and sage grouse.*

### **3. Private Landowner and Resource Conflicts and Benefits**

- *Agreements in principle on ways to make the siting process more proactive to address private landowner needs and resource conflicts.*
- *Consideration of agriculture, cultural and historic resources, mineral resources, impacts to private property, aesthetics, night skies, safety, and setbacks.*

### **4. Improvements to the Existing Permitting Process**

- *What are limitations to WY's existing permitting processes? Focus on opportunities to improve, streamline, incentivize, and increase certainty of project development.*
- *Consideration of county interests, workforce and development, redundancies between local and state permitting, permitting bottlenecks,*

### **5. Low Hanging Fruit for Policy Development**

- *Programmatic EIS for Solar on public lands*
- *Recommendations to remove barriers to brownfield development*
- *Opportunities for influencing utility bid preferences*
- *Regional planning zones/alliances*
- *Other ideas as generated by the group*

## **6. Wrap-up**

- *Finalize recommendation packages*
- *Conclusion and next steps*