



western views

Protecting Utah's Communities and Natural Resources from Coal-Fired Power Plants: Emerging Threats Inspire Action

By Joro Walker, Utah Office Director

The Interior West faces an unprecedented surge of proposals to construct new coal-fired power plants or expand existing plants. Many people do not realize that as many as 26 projects are planned in the near future. In Utah alone, there are three plant proposals that could significantly harm air quality. Alarmingly, two of the plants have already been approved by Utah's Division of Air Quality.

We, along with our colleagues at the Sierra Club and the Grand Canyon Trust, are challenging these proposals. Our goals are to protect Utah's spectacular vistas from being obscured by haze and to uphold the quality of life in the communities that will be most affected.

Construction of a new 270-megawatt Sevier Power Company (SPC) plant is slated for south central Utah's stunning Sevier Valley, east of Capitol Reef National Park. This plant will emit substantial amounts of mercury and significantly affect visibility in Utah's National Parks, like Capitol Reef and Canyonlands, parks visited by thousands of people each year who come to enjoy the redrock vistas. Residents of the sparsely populated Sevier Valley are fighting the SPC plant alongside of us, concerned about the effects emissions will have on them, their families, and the beauty of their valley.

The second approved proposal is for a 950-megawatt expansion of the Intermountain

Power Plant (IPP) in Delta, Utah. Located in western Utah, the IPP already produces 1,755 megawatts of electricity or enough for 1,755,000 homes. Notably, while Utah bears the burden of IPP's emissions, at least 75% of the electricity generated by the facility is sent to California—increasing the trend of production here for use elsewhere.

The proposed plants will have a useful life of 50 to 60 years, during which they will emit enormous amounts of carbon dioxide and other greenhouse gases into the atmosphere. For example, in 2001, the existing IPP facility generated over 15 million tons of carbon dioxide, a substantial contribution from the Interior West to the global issue of climate change.

WRA has been involved throughout the permitting process for the proposed plants. In November 2004, we appealed the Division of Air Quality's decision to approve the permits at the Utah Air Quality Board. We believe that the plants' impacts to health-based air pollution standards at nearby National Parks are unacceptable. We are submitting extensive documentation that the plants' designs are badly outdated and do not even include the latest pollution controls being used on similar outdated plants. This March, the Air Quality Board will begin considering these issues.

While WRA is determined to stop the proliferation of coal-fired power plants in the West, we are also proposing solutions for cleaner coal technologies. You can help. If you want to take action, writing letters to the editor to your local paper is an effective way for citizens to voice their opinion to a large audience. To learn more about the issues, contact Sean Phelan in WRA's Utah office at 801-487-9911. You can also refer to WRA's recent report, *A Balanced Energy Plan for the Interior West*. You can access the report at <http://www.westernresourceadvocates.org/energy>.



The Maze, Canyonlands.

PHOTO COURTESY OF JEREMY CARLSON.

Lands Program Highlights

Recent Work to Protect Western Landscapes

Wind Energy Development on Western Public Lands

WRA recently expressed cautious support for BLM's plans to develop wind energy projects on some western federal lands. Knowing that public support for renewable energy will remain strong if wind power projects are properly located and designed, we are encouraging BLM to listen closely to stakeholders about where and how to construct wind farms on federal lands.

Colorado

On the Roan Plateau, WRA is working to protect wilderness quality lands. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) should heed the consensus of local governments that are speaking out to protect the top of the Plateau for recreation, wildlife, and stream health. As BLM seeks to allow drill rigs and access roads in the wild heart of this remarkable landscape, we advocate limiting development to the Plateau's base where industry is already drilling thousands of wells.

Utah

We are also challenging oil and gas leasing on roadless areas in the Uinta and Wasatch-Cache National Forests. At risk are the sage grouse, Bonneville cutthroat trout, and raptors, as well as rivers that qualify for Wild and Scenic designation, like Fifth Water Creek. To date, BLM has sold leases for more than 92,100 acres of roadless areas in these forests.

Energy Program Highlights



Amendment 37 for Renewable Energy in Colorado: The Hottest Award-Winning Issue Around

Western Resource Advocates is delighted to announce that Amendment 37, requiring that 10% of Colorado energy to be derived from renewable resources by the year 2015, has won the “Hot New Trend” Award for national ballot issues in 2004 from the Ballot Initiative Strategy Center! And it gets better. Amendment 37’s logo, designed by Denver firm Welchert & Britz, Inc. also won a gold Pollie award.

2 Amendment 37, drafted by Rick Gilliam at Western Resource Advocates, passed with 54% voter support in November 2004 and was the first of its kind to ever be decided at the ballot box. The ground-breaking Amendment lays the foundation for other states that have been unable to pass similar reforms through their legislatures.

As we begin the complicated work of implementing the new law, congratulations and thanks go out to all who worked to pass Amendment 37. You’ve set us on the path to a cleaner energy future, and won some well-deserved awards along the way.

Xcel Energy’s Windsource Program

WRA Wards Off a Chilly Breeze

In early 2004, Xcel Energy proposed increasing the premium it charges to Windsource customers. Windsource is an important program, and one that we generally support because the voluntary program allows Xcel customers to pay extra on their bills to support development of wind projects in Colorado. According to Xcel, the increased rate was needed because the original premium was a “value” price and not

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Changes in Boulder Water Rates Fairer to Citizens and Better for Rivers

By Bart Miller, Water Program Director

The City of Boulder, Colorado is one of a growing number of cities that is taking steps to improve community water conservation, thanks in part to Western Resource Advocates. Boulder’s City Council recently adopted an innovative new water rate structure called an individual water “budget” that will educate customers about wise water use and provide them greater control over what they pay for water on a monthly basis. “With the new rate structure, Boulder residents and businesses are very likely to use less water and have greater awareness of how their urban water demands are connected to the natural river ecosystems, like Boulder Creek, from which we draw our water,” said Boulder Mayor Mark Ruzzin in praising the change. “Boulder is working hard to be a responsible steward of our water resources here in the semi-arid Interior West, and WRA played an invaluable role in helping us take this next step.”

Over the next 18 months, Boulder utility staff will calculate an individual “budget” for each residential and commercial customer. Each budget will be based on typical annual indoor use as well as a monthly determination of actual needs for outdoor irrigation. Accompanying educational materials will explain that outdoor watering needs are significantly lower in the months of May and September than in the heat of the summer.

Compared to the current pricey system, the budget rate structure will provide an individually-tailored conservation message about what each customer actually needs, rewarding those who use less than their budget with lower rates and charging

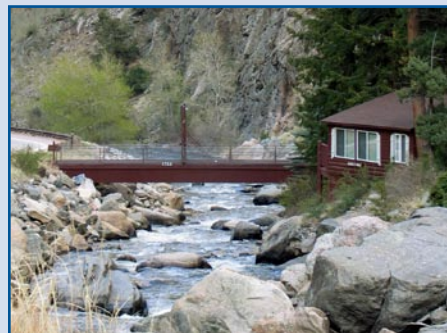
higher rates for those who greatly exceed their budget. The system promises to improve conservation while, at the same time, avoid over-charging larger water users—as long as they are efficient with their use. For commercial customers, the Council directed City staff to collect data to develop “benchmarks” for use inside different categories (e.g., restaurants, hotels, manufacturing plants) so that more individualized budgets can be developed in the near future.

Boulder is working hard to be a responsible steward of our water resources ... WRA played an invaluable role in helping us take this next step.

—Boulder Mayor Mark Ruzzin

The new “budget” rate structure results from nearly two years of advocacy by citizens on the volunteer Water Resources Advisory Board. Joining that board in April of last year, WRA helped finalize the budget concept and explained it to the City Council, who voted unanimously to approve it. This success highlights the benefits of working closely with city governments to help them move toward more efficient use of our natural resources.

Boulder now joins Highlands Ranch, Colorado, and a few other cities as models for cutting-edge water efficiency in the West. Next on the list is Denver. If we are successful there, 1.2 million customers will be charged more fairly for the water they use while their conservation efforts are rewarded. WRA is also working in Utah this winter and spring with other conservation groups to improve water rate structures that have great room for improvement, and will be heading south to New Mexico in a similar effort this summer. Without a doubt, WRA’s efforts are beginning to re-shape how cities provide water for customers and, as a result, lessen the impact that new water withdrawals might have on many river systems that are already over-stressed by human water use. We and our partners will continue to create solutions that work for people and for natural river systems.



Water rate structures can help protect rivers and streams.

Xcel Energy's New Pueblo Coal Plant: Why WRA Settled Instead of Sued

by John Nielsen, Energy Program Director

We've recently had questions from our supporters about why it is good news that we, along with others in the conservation community, came to a settlement agreement with Xcel Energy that will allow them to move forward with plans to build a new 750-megawatt coal-fired power plant near Pueblo, Colorado. We don't blame you for asking. It's a tough dilemma, and so we have devoted some space in this newsletter to tell you about our thinking.

Let me start by saying that Western Resource Advocates is not in the business of supporting new conventional coal-fired power plants. And believe me, we will have many battles to fight in coming years. Right now, there are 26 new coal-fired power plants being proposed across the Interior West in the beautiful places that we call home, and we are fighting all of them. That represents an enormous challenge—more on that in the next newsletter.

So why did we reach a settlement agreement with Xcel Energy instead of fighting the Pueblo plant? Simply put, we determined early in developing our strategy that the plant was going to be approved, in part due to significant new energy demands as Colorado's population grows and in part due to the current regulatory climate. Despite our best efforts to stop the plant, it was going to go forward. So we quickly turned to **making sure it would be the cleanest coal plant we could get**, and that polices would be put in place to ensure that cleaner, more sustainable energy resources would be developed in the future. **And that is a fight that we won.**

We teamed up with a diverse set of religious, community, and conservation groups in a united effort to test Xcel's commitment to a negotiated solution. Negotiate we did, for months.

In December the Public Utilities Commission approved the agreement we reached, which includes numerous and measurable environmental concessions from Xcel that, when combined, **will ultimately result in cleaner air for the people of Pueblo and Colorado—even with the plant being built.**



Under the agreement, Xcel will install state-of-the-art pollution controls on the new unit and will clean up two existing coal units at the site, with the net result being a significant reduction in total emissions of sulfur dioxide and nitrogen oxides. Xcel also agreed to dramatically increase investments in energy conservation and renewable energy over the next decade.

For the first time, Xcel is also required to account for the cost of global warming and greenhouse gas emissions in its resource acquisition decisions. This is a significant step forward, since it represents a decision by a major western utility—the fifth biggest in the nation—to not only acknowledge this issue but to impute a carbon dioxide cost in evaluating the costs of new resources. We believe that, over time, this will help shift Xcel to a less carbon-intensive electricity supply and is an important precedent that we can use to persuade other utilities to begin addressing global warming.

For our part we, and other citizens' and environmental groups, have agreed not to further challenge the plant. The citizen's and environmental groups that signed the agreement included Western Resource Advocates, Environmental Defense, Environment Colorado, Southwestern Energy Efficiency Project, the Colorado Renewable Energy Society, the Sierra Club, the Bishop of Pueblo, Better Pueblo, and Smart Growth Advocates.

On the whole, we believe that **this agreement is a major step forward**, though we're less than pleased about a new coal plant. We are, however, certain that the results of our agreement will be much better air quality and greater investments in renewable energy and efficiency than we could ever have gotten had we chosen to litigate.

This is a story that represents the times in which we live, with growing population and pressure to meet energy needs. Hopefully the plant at Pueblo will be the last of its kind in Colorado. We at WRA will work as quickly and as hard as we can to ensure a cleaner, more sustainable energy future for the West—and will be sure to tell you the good, the bad, and the ugly along the way.



**spot
light**
**Bob
Randall**

Lands Advocate

From Anchorage to Boulder is a long move, and Bob Randall did a lot of moving in 2004. He got married, changed jobs, sold his house, and came to Colorado to work at Western Resource Advocates in the Lands Program, specializing in oil and gas cases. Bob's seven years as a staff attorney with the nonprofit law firm, Trustees for Alaska, allowed him to work on nationally-prominent issues in meaningful ways, both as a litigator and as a counselor. He was able to make a difference in keeping snowmobiles out of Denali National Park's designated wilderness, protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and its coastline from oil drills, and regulating oil and gas operations near Prudhoe Bay.

Bob was attracted to WRA's close-knit staff, as well as the opportunity to work with a regional organization close to the issues in the West. "WRA presents a great opportunity for me to work with a diverse group of attorneys, policy experts, and technical specialists to protect the natural landscape of the Interior West." That, and the year-round availability of fresh vegetables in the supermarkets!

Moving to Colorado puts Bob and his wife, Kate, closer to family, and gives Kate the opportunity to pursue graduate work in landscape architecture at the University of Colorado. They're in the process of settling in and buying a home, which will have a darkroom and workshop to feed Bob's artistic side: he is attracted to outdated technology, and collects old cameras and computers that he dismantles and recreates into art pieces. Bob fits in well with the WRA family with this perfect balance between the intricacies of conservation work, and his easy manner and fine sense of humor. We are very pleased to have Bob Randall on staff.



Protecting Utah’s Communities and Natural Resources from Coal-Fired Power Plants

The Interior West faces more than 26 proposals to construct new coal-fired power plants or expand existing plants. WRA is challenging these proposals. You can help.

Changes in Boulder Water Rates More Fair to Citizens and Better for Rivers

Boulder, Colorado joins a growing number of cities working to improve community water conservation.

Xcel Energy’s New Pueblo Coal Plant: Why WRA Settled Instead of Sued

Securing the best outcome for communities is a complex process.

Plus, Energy and Lands Program Highlights and more!

Energy Highlights, cont.

intended to reflect actual costs. WRA felt that the new price proposed by Xcel included costs that were inappropriate to charge to Wind-source customers.

In no small victory, WRA and others successfully reached an agreement with Xcel to leave the Windsource price at its current level, and to have the program certified by the Green-e program to help assure that the customers are getting what they pay for.

Let the Sun Shine In

Also of note is Xcel Energy’s recent agreement to withdraw a proposal that would have penalized customers that put solar electric systems (photovoltaics) on their homes. Xcel Energy had proposed changes to its net metering practices that, in our view, were inconsistent with Colorado’s recently passed Amendment 37 calling for increased use of renewable energy resources. This marks another WRA victory to ease the way for solar electricity.

WRA Wish List

You can help meet our equipment needs for both our Colorado and Utah offices. Our wish list includes a black and white laser printer, a color laser printer, a digital camera and flat panel monitors. Please contact Carrie Pearse, 303-444-1188 x 211 with any equipment donation questions. Thanks!

www.westernresourceadvocates.org



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