

CLEAN AIR ADVOCATES CHALLENGE COAL-FIRED POWER PLANT EXPANSION

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PHOENIX —Clean air advocates are challenging a recent decision by the Arizona Corporation Commission to approve the construction of two new 400-megawatt coal-fired generating units by Tucson Electric Power (TEP) at its Springerville Generating Station in eastern Arizona. The Grand Canyon Trust and the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies filed suit in Superior Court on Thursday, January 9, 2003. The suit, which requests that the Court vacate the Commission's decision, was filed on behalf of the two groups by attorney Tim Hogan, with the Arizona Center for Law in the Public Interest.

“Tucson Electric Power is proposing a project that will single-handedly increase Arizona's carbon dioxide emissions by more than 10 percent,” said Geoff Barnard, President of the Grand Canyon Trust. “At the same time, Senator John McCain is doing great work at the national level to reduce greenhouse gases. TEP's project just doesn't make sense.”

“The Corporation Commission is required by state law to balance ‘the need for an adequate, economical and reliable supply of power with the desire to minimize the effect thereof on the environment and ecology of the state’,” said Hogan. “TEP did not establish that the residents or businesses of Arizona need this power, either now or in the future.”

Under TEP's proposal, the carbon dioxide emissions from Springerville would more than double, increasing Arizona's carbon dioxide emissions by approximately 5 million tons. Hazardous air pollutants such as arsenic, mercury, and other heavy metals would also increase significantly.

“The threat of climate change to the Interior West can no longer be ignored,” said Bruce Driver, Executive Director of the Land and Water Fund of the Rockies. “Arizona is swimming in a surplus of power and we simply cannot afford to build unneeded coal plants especially when our region is blessed with an abundance of cleaner and less carbon-intensive alternatives.”

A recent report by more than two dozen climate scientists and engineers from Scripps Institute, the University of Washington, the Department of Energy, and the U.S. Geological Survey, among others, predicts that global warming will have a devastating effect on water resources in the West. The report says that reservoir levels along the Colorado River may drop by more than a third and hydropower generation will drop by as much as 40 percent. The report also found that increases in summer temperatures and decreases in summer humidity may cause a “substantial increase in fire danger over much of the West”.

“Right now, almost half of the electricity generated in Arizona comes from coal, even though it is the most carbon-intensive fuel used to generate electricity,” said Rick Moore, Program Officer with the Grand Canyon Trust. “Rather than building new coal-fired power plants, Arizona’s best bet is to promote cleaner energy sources and most importantly, use our existing supply of electricity in a more efficient way. A recent report by the Southwest Energy Efficiency Project shows that if Arizona invested about \$1 billion dollars in energy savings programs over the next 10 years, Arizona residents and businesses would save more than \$4 billion dollars and drastically reduce the need for building new power plants.”

“We think there are cheaper, cleaner and less risky alternatives to the construction of additional coal plants that the Corporation Commission never fully considered,” said Eric Guidry, Energy Project Staff Attorney with the Land and Water Fund. “But if the Corporation Commission is going to allow the construction of additional coal plants in Arizona, it should at least require the cleanest and most efficient coal technologies available.”

Guidry cited a recent decision by New Mexico to investigate coal gasification for a proposed coal-fired power plant near Gallup, New Mexico. Coal gasification technologies have reduced carbon dioxide, mercury and other air emissions relative to conventional coal technologies.

“Unfortunately the Commission rejected our request for TEP to conduct a feasibility study for using gasification technology at Springerville,” he added. “Unless we look at these cleaner options up front, Arizona could find itself saddled with a multi-billion dollar investment in an outdated technology that risks becoming obsolete soon after it is constructed.”

The Grand Canyon Trust is a regional conservation organization based in Flagstaff Arizona that works to protect and restore the canyon country of the Colorado Plateau—its spectacular landscapes, flowing rivers, clean air, diversity of plants and animals, and areas of beauty and solitude.

The Land and Water Fund of the Rockies is a regional environmental law and policy center serving the Interior West. It uses law, economics, and policy analysis to protect land, air and water resources and assure that energy demands are met in an economically and environmentally sound manner.

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