

Idaho ranks near bottom of Western states preparing to add generation capacity

Study of federal statistics shows Idaho will add just 412 megawatts by 2011, well below numbers for other states

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Idaho is ill-prepared to face its future energy needs, according to a study of proposed power plants compiled by the U.S. Energy Information Agency (USEIA).

Between 2008 and 2012, Idaho is scheduled to bring on line 412 megawatts of energy, mostly from natural gas, putting it third from the bottom among the 11 Western states. Idaho's doing a bit better, however: last year, Idaho ranked dead last among the Western states. This year, some proposed natural gas facilities pushed Idaho's ranking beyond that of Utah and Montana, which have seen some projects cancelled.

California is the most energy-ambitious state, with 10,416 MW of power proposed to be developed by 2012, followed by Colorado at 2,289 MW. Already, Idaho imports half its electricity, mostly from coal-burning plants in Wyoming and Nevada.

Don Gillispie, president and CEO of Alternate Energy Holdings Inc., praised the state's efforts to put a higher priority on energy generation. AEHI is seeking to build an advanced nuclear reactor in Elmore County. Gillispie pointed to the Idaho Department of Commerce hiring a person to work full-time on promoting energy generation in the state and Gov. Otter establishing an Office of Energy Policy directly under him as signs that Idaho leaders take energy development seriously.

Nevertheless, Gillispie said the low ranking shows Idaho needs to start planning seriously for its energy future. Gillispie noted his plant is the only large base-load plant currently proposed for Idaho. At the same time, the USEIA forecasts energy demand in the U.S. will grow by 42 percent by 2030. In late 2007, two major employers announced they were bypassing southern Idaho because utilities couldn't provide them with enough electricity and Hoku Materials has been having trouble finding sufficient energy for its polysilicon facility near Pocatello.

"Idaho has about 1,100 megawatts of in-state generating capacity and it took us nearly a century to build it up," Gillispie said. "If we're going to provide for our future energy needs, we've really got to get on the ball and start adding capacity."

The AEHI reactor, proposed for Elmore County, isn't included in USEIA listings because it's still in the preliminary stages and the plant will start generating electricity in 2016 at the soonest. Gillispie has notified the Nuclear Regulatory Commission of his intent to build a reactor.

Gillispie also said much of the power expected to be produced in Idaho in the USEIA report could be sold out-of-state. For example, the Goshen II wind farm, recently approved for construction in Bonneville County, has already agreed to sell its wind to Southern California utilities for the next 20 years. Gillispie has consistently pledged to offer electricity from his proposed plant to Idaho utilities. Gillispie also said his proposed plant, the Idaho Energy Complex, could power all the homes in Idaho three times over, meaning there will be plenty of electricity to meet in-state needs and also to sell to neighboring states.

“Our opponents are concerned our power may be sold out-of-state but looking at the current trend, it’s much more likely we will be forced to import even more of our power, paying increased transmission and production costs to out-of-state utilities,” Gillispie said. “More than ever, we need the reliable, non-polluting, high-volume energy that nuclear produces.”

According to the USEIA figures, the 11 Western states are scheduled to bring on line nearly 22,000 MW of power between 2008 and 2012, up from 20,000 MW between 2007 and 2011; most of the energy will come from natural gas. A megawatt is enough energy to power about 850 homes (fewer in times of high demand and more in times of lower demand), not counting agriculture, industry or commerce.

Idaho imports half its energy, while California imports just 22 percent of its energy. Much of Idaho’s imported energy comes from coal plants in Wyoming and Nevada owned by Idaho Power. Idaho gets about 1 percent of its electricity from the nuclear Hanford Generating Station in Washington.

Idaho looks a little better on a per-capita basis, adding about 294 watts per person between 2008 and 2012, based on a current population of 1.4 million. By comparison, California will be adding about 274 watts per person during that time, based on a current population of 38 million.

Idahoans use more electricity, however. On a per-capita basis, Idahoans in 2003 used 15,510 kilowatt-hours (12th highest in the nation and second among Western states), compared to 6,732 kWh per person in California (lowest in the nation); see www.energy.ca.gov/electricity/us_percapita_electricity_2003.html. Idaho has a high concentration of agriculture and computer hardware manufacturing, which demand large amounts of electricity.

Gillispie and other analysts said the power supply operates on a regional basis. The more regional supply increases relative to demand, the more downward pressure there will be on prices. So, even if an energy plant exports electricity across state lines, that will increase regional supply and help keep prices lower.

ABOUT THE IDAHO ENERGY COMPLEX: The Idaho Energy Complex (www.alternateenergyholdings.com) will be a large advanced nuclear reactor with low cooling water requirements located about 65 miles southeast of Boise, in Elmore County. The Elmore County Commission is expected to decide in June or July on an application from the company to rezone land for the reactor

Current table: Megawatts of electrical generation planned by year for each Western state. 2008-2012

	2008	2009	2010	2011	2012	TOTAL
California	1,250	2,275	1,681	1,737	3,473	10,416

Nevada	1,626	0	28	635	0	2,289
Washington	1,140	539	54	0	0	1,733
Arizona	249	495	0	615	280	1,639
Colorado	294	1,108	0	0	0	1,402
Wyoming	573	1	90	390	320	1,374
Oregon	385	102	0	584	0	1,071
New Mexico	860	110	0	0	0	970
Idaho	262	128	4	18	0	412
Montana	0	121	150	70	0	341
Utah	54	0	20	0	0	74

Previous table: Megawatts of electrical generation planned by year for each Western state, 2007-2011

	2007	2008	2009	2010	2011	TOTAL
California	1,533	358	1,724	1,350	1,377	6,342
Colorado	1,189	271	1,459	0	0	2,919
Nevada	135	1,571	0	28	658	2,392
Washington	448	862	0	310	339	1,949
New Mexico	110	1,356	0	0	0	1,466
Oregon	836	584	0	0	0	1,420
Wyoming	90	0	0	440	710	1,240
Arizona	0	249	630	0	0	879
Utah	579	30	0	120	0	729
Montana	2	500	91	0	0	593
Idaho	146	191	0	0	0	337

Source: United States Energy Information Agency table at www.eia.doe.gov/cneaf/electricity/epa/planned_capacity_state.xls released Jan. 29, 2009