

## Area energy projects still on schedule

By Nate Poppino  
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From Montana to Florida, attempts to expand the nation's cramped power grid have been hampered by the recent economic downturn.

But the country's financial turbulence hasn't harmed several large-scale energy projects in southern Idaho, developers of those projects said last week.

If anything, the economy has just led Idaho Power Co. officials to be a little more cautious about large-scale plans to build new interstate transmission lines and a natural gas plant over the next few years, said Echo Chadwick, the utility's director of corporate communications.

None of the company's development plans have changed so far, Chadwick said. But officials are keeping a close eye on the markets and regularly examining their plans to see what adjustments, if any, need to be made.

"If people aren't loaning money ... it certainly does impact our ability to be effective," said Chadwick, adding that the company is working to keep its credit rating strong.

Part of the problem, she said, is that changes might be hard to make. The utility's grid is maxing out, and the company has to find new transmission or generation sources to keep serving its customers. And those customers are asked to help pay for it.

"During a time when the economy is down, we're certainly sensitive to (the fact that) asking customers to pay more for electric service isn't a great place to be in," she said.

A 185-turbine, 425-megawatt wind project planned for west of Rogerson is also still on track, developers said. Jointly developed by Portland-based Renewable Energy Systems America Developments and NV Energy, formerly Nevada Power, the first phase of the wind farm is still set to be built in the first half of 2011 and is going through an environmental review.

Earlier in November, natural gas prices and the credit market delayed an even more massive project in Texas, to be built in 2011 by billionaire T. Boone Pickens' Mesa Power. And Florida Power and Light trimmed its 2009 capital expenditures plan by nearly 25 percent, planning only 1,100 megawatts of new wind power instead of 1,500. But despite some similarities, China Mountain is early enough in development that finances aren't yet an issue, said Scott Piscitello, vice-president of project development for RES America.

The major funding for the \$500 million project wouldn't be sought until mid-2010, he said. For now, he said, "We're spending relatively small dollars on developing the project."

Boise-based Windland Inc. hasn't been able to build its planned 200-megawatt project on Cotterel Mountain in Cassia County. But its delay is more due to a lack of interest from Idaho Power, the likely customer for its power, said Mike Heckler, Windland director of marketing and development.

Both developers said other delayed projects may not hurt their plans. RES America's partnership with an electric utility should give it a competitive edge among those building in 2011, Piscitello said. And Heckler said canceled projects mean more wind turbine parts are available now, easing Windland's costs when it builds.

"It remains a great wind resource," Heckler said of Cotterel. "It makes sense and will be built."

A long timeline may not benefit everyone. A uranium enrichment facility to be built by French-owned Areva NC Inc. still seems to be on track for 2014. But officials with Alternate Energy Holdings Inc., the company planning to construct a nuclear power plant in Elmore County by 2016, have turned to Asian financiers to try to raise capital for their effort and said a couple of weeks ago that their project isn't an easy one.

"It's ambitious and challenging, even in good times," spokesman Martin Johncox said, adding that the company still sees a plant as necessary and doable.

The biggest challenge may just be guessing what's to come. Chadwick said the market coverage she's

watched lately has left her wondering when bad credit card debt and longer-term mortgages will cause more trouble.

"I don't think we've seen all the effects," she said.

The Associated Press contributed to this report.

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