



My Turn

## Renewable Taos backs Kit Carson, calls for clean energy transition plan

Board of Renewable Taos

*The Taos News, 9/18/2014*

Since Plains Electric merged with Tri-State in 2000, Kit Carson (KCEC) has protested every Tri-State rate increase. Ironically, one of the reasons for the merger was the promise of price stability. Sadly, we've seen 11 price increases in less than 14 years, more than doubling the wholesale cost of electricity.

The first nine of these increases were imposed by Tri-State. However, KCEC convinced other cooperatives to join its protests, and the last two increases have not gone through. Instead a regulatory process involving the NM Public Regulation Commission was triggered. KCEC ratepayers have saved over \$2 million as a result.

**CONDITIONAL RATE INCREASE:** The regulatory process includes a mediation step, and KCEC and Tri-State have discussed possible resolutions for the last few months. One initial step has been accepted by both sides – a conditional rate increase of a little over two tenths of a cent per kilowatt hour through 2015. That is a fraction of the increases Tri-State tried to impose and is conditional on resolution of other issues.

**RELEASE FROM 2040 CONTRACT:** One positive outcome of this process may be relief from the restrictive 2040 all-requirements contract with Tri-State. Its key restriction is commitment to obtain 95 percent of energy sold to KCEC customers directly from Tri-State. Its second problem is the lengthy term of the agreement. We are hopeful the final result of the mediation will be that Kit Carson is free to seek other suppliers and sign shorter-term agreements.

**KIT CARSON DOING A GREAT JOB:** The mediation process is complicated, but KCEC management and board are doing an excellent job representing our interests and deserve support. More detailed information is available on the KCEC website. Tri-State energetically defends coal and centralized power. They emphasize cost advantages and ignore health and environmental consequences. They completely discount economic benefits of local production. Until recently, Tri-State planned to meet new electricity demand with new coal plants, and we would be required to go along in lock-step.

## **COAL PRICES RISE, RENEWABLE PRICES FALL:**

Two powerful trends are changing the energy landscape – climate change and cheaper renewable energy. Climate change means more energetic efforts to curtail coal plants and emissions. That means higher prices for fossil fuels.

Meanwhile renewable energy is steadily becoming cheaper.

Wind is already cheaper than coal, and solar is fast closing the gap. Technical problems are being overcome and the modularity of solar-electric and wind power facilitates steady expansion. We're actually far beyond the point where renewables are cheaper than coal if we account for the damage caused by mining, emissions, and water consumption.

**NORTH-CENTRAL NEW MEXICO CAN GENERATE ITS OWN CLEAN ENERGY:** We are rich in renewable energy, including solar and geothermal, and can easily generate all our energy. Eastern New Mexico is rich in wind and solar, and we can work with them to put together a mix of clean energy. We know that is possible because there are four utility-scale solar plants across the Colorado border that produce more energy, all clean, than is consumed in the KCEC service area. They do it unobtrusively with solar arrays that occupy less than two square miles. An example is the 30 Megawatt Cogentrix Alamosa Solar Plant on 225 acres a few miles northwest of Alamosa.

**WHAT'S NEXT:** Once the dispute with Tri-State is resolved, we need to discuss our energy future. The transition to clean energy is something the entire community needs to consider carefully. We spend more than \$60 million each year on energy expenses. Imagine that amount circulating within our local economy.

Local governments in the Enchanted Circle have signed a Joint Resolution on Renewable Energy. It calls for transition planning to guide us in a concerted effort. That work can give help and direction for Kit Carson and local government as well as provide stable, predictable energy prices for our community.

Some clear guidelines and principles as well as important milestones can make the transition simpler and much more rewarding for our community.

The project has the advantage of getting community input and support on some of the issues concerning pace of change and costs and benefits of the various paths to a clean energy future.

Renewable Taos has a suggestion for the starting point of this discussion in the form of a principle – Never purchase dirty energy when clean energy alternatives are available at the same or lower price.

*The Board of Renewable Taos — Bob Bresnahan, Mary Emery, John Gusdorf, Jay Levine, and Gaia Mika — and William Brown of Sage West Consultants submitted this op-ed.*

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Courtesy Photo

The 30-Megawatt Cogentrix Alamosa Solar Plant on 225 acres in the San Luis Valley, Colorado.

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