

**Oversight Hearing on The West-wide Energy Corridor Process: State and  
Community Impacts**

**Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests, and Public Lands and  
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources**

**United States House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources**

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Mr. Chairman, Members of the Subcommittee, I thank you for inviting me to address this joint hearing and provide the opportunity to share the views of Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association (Tri-State) concerning the West-wide Energy Corridor Process.

Before I begin, let me introduce myself and provide some background on Tri-State and our interest in this issue. My name is Joel Bladow and I am the Senior Vice President, Transmission for Tri-State. Tri-State is a member-owned Generation and Transmission Association that produces and delivers wholesale electric power to our 44 member/owners. Our members include distribution cooperatives and public power districts in Colorado, Nebraska, New Mexico and Wyoming. Tri-State's member distribution systems serve an estimated population of over 1.2 million people. Our 250,000-square-mile member service territory includes all of parts of 56 of Colorado's 64 counties, all or parts of 27 counties throughout New Mexico, all or parts of 20 counties in western Nebraska, and all or parts of 14 counties in central and northern Wyoming. Tri-State's transmission system includes approximately 5,200 miles of high-voltage transmission line and over 150 switchyards and substations.

There have been numerous reports and studies over the past few years recommending additional electrical power transmission infrastructure be added to the nation's power grid. Tri-State supports efforts that help the nation reach this goal. In that light, Tri-State applauds the efforts of the lead federal agencies, the Department of Energy and the Bureau of Land Management, as well as the cooperating federal agencies, the U.S. Forest Service, the Department of Defense, and the Fish and Wildlife Service, to designate corridors on federal land in the 11 Western states for oil, gas, and hydrogen pipelines and electricity transmission and distribution facilities (energy corridors), as required by Section 368 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005. This process was developed to assist in the efficient and cost-effective transmission of energy resources being generated in the western United States while minimizing environmental impacts. As a cost-based, member-owned association, these are goals that Tri-State supports. One of the most difficult issues associated with building new infrastructure is obtaining the required permits. By identifying corridors on federal lands, utilities and other project developers

will be better able to identify potential routes to evaluate and ultimately decide whether or not to build the project.

The service territory of Tri-State's Members is diverse, not only in terms of customer's served, but also in terms of the climate and geographical terrain. It includes suburban, rural, recreational, and industrial loads, as well as substantial irrigation loads from numerous farms and ranches. There are significant tracts of Federal lands in our members' service territory and Tri-State has transmission facilities located on federal lands. In working with the federal land management agencies, Tri-State interacts with 50 different offices. These offices often have different approaches and standards that are applied to the various processes required for permitting new facilities. The effort to define energy corridors has helped to identify these differences which, we hope, leads to a more consistent evaluation process.

Timely evaluation and construction of new electric power transmission facilities is critical to maintaining the high level of reliability that Tri-State's members expect. In addition to the increased load across our members' service territory, significant challenges exist when integrating renewable (intermittent) resources into the existing system. Renewable Portfolio Standards have been adopted in two of the states Tri-State serves which increase the likelihood that renewable resources will be developed and connected to the electric power transmission system. Tri-State's service area includes some of the best wind, and solar generation sites in the country. We presently have requests for over 8,000 MW of interconnection from 41 wind projects in our transmission interconnection queue. Tri-State's existing transmission system can accommodate only a fraction of these requests, additional transmission infrastructure will have to be built to take advantage of the renewable resource potential in our geographical area. Developing resources in the rural areas Tri-State's members' serve will benefit both the local rural economies and provide renewable resources to larger urban and industrial load centers.

Tri-State supports efforts that help build critically needed infrastructure across federal lands. Efforts, such as the implementation of the provisions of Section 368 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, can help developers, utilities, and local communities plan and site critically needed infrastructure to improve the reliability of the electric transmission system, enhance the development of renewable resources, and provide for economical development in rural areas.

I would like to thank the Chairman for the opportunity to provide input on this important issue and would be happy to answer any questions.