

Alternative energy

Proposed Bear Lake pump project has few supporters

Many worry energy project could alter the lake's natural beauty

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GARDEN CITY - A hydroelectric pump project is creating a swell of public outcry in the Bear Lake community.

Approximately 100 people, including state Rep. Fred Hunsaker, crowded the Garden City administrative office at a public information meeting Friday night to learn more about the Hook Canyon Pump Storage Project proposed by Logan engineering firm Symbiotics LLC.

David and Claudia Cottle, residents of Salt Lake City and Fish Haven, Idaho, are executive directors of the nonprofit Bear Lake Watch group, which moderated the meeting. The Cottles encouraged "intelligent public comment" and cooperation with decision-making agencies as the three- to five-year licensing and permitting process unfolds.

"There is a push to look at alternative energy solutions. I believe that our big issue is Bear Lake. I think that the economic viability of the project will get weighed against the value of Bear Lake," Claudia Cottle said. "This lake is important to this state. This state profits from red rocks, white snow and this blue lake."

The proposed project includes a 270-foot-high dam to store 21,857 acre-feet of water. A powerhouse would pump more than 18,000 cubic feet of water per second daily to generate approximately 1,120 megawatts of power throughout the region. This output compares with coal-fired plants near Delta, which produce approximately 900 megawatts daily.

Fourteen turbines, an emergency spillway and the underground powerhouse are proposed for construction on the east-central side of Bear Lake between North Eden and South Eden in Utah.

No Symbiotics representatives were present at the public meeting, and supporters appeared to be few and far between. But Garth Barker, a resident of Logan whose son works for Symbiotics, said the renewable-energy proposal is worth investigating further.

Because of the future energy problems that the Utah bubble faces, all alternative energy sources need to be explored, Barker said.

Bryce Nielson, a retired fisheries biologist and Bear Lake Watch board member, said the costs are too great.

"It's 200,000 years old. It has four endemic species of fish that are found nowhere else in the world," Nielson said, adding that the lake's azure blue color would be in jeopardy if calcium carbonate at the bottom is disturbed. "If these turbines start to kick that stuff up, it will cloud the lake, suffocate the fish eggs and basically do away with the entire fish population in the lake. It would never freeze because the water would be stirred up all the time. We'd have constant fog here. It would completely change the climate."

Garden City Mayor Ken Hansen said the process will likely come down to a matter of public opinion.

"If anything negative happens to change that lake, it is going to be devastating to the economy of this community and Rich County," Hansen said.

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