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Groundbreaking Coalition Formed to Improve Planning Process for the Eastern Electric Grid

WASHINGTON—A diverse group of more than a dozen environmental, renewable energy, and energy efficiency advocates, utilities, and other organizations, including the Natural Resources Defense Council, the American Wind Energy Association, and American Electric Power, has proposed to engage a broad set of stakeholders in developing plans to upgrade and expand the electric grid in the eastern U.S. The Sustainable Transmission for Eastern-Interconnection Planning Project (STEPP) would convene interested parties and provide them with the technical, analytic and logistical resources needed to provide meaningful input to regional and utility transmission planners.

“In extensive consultations over the past year – with more than 100 organizations and government agencies – on how to transform the nation’s electric power system to deliver clean energy, improve energy security, and address global climate change, improved electric system planning emerged as the single most important issue,” said Reid Detchon, Executive Director of the Energy Future Coalition. “Engaging a wide range of stakeholders in a participatory, transparent, and analytically robust planning process is essential to building broad support for national infrastructure investments.”

STEPP represents a broad group of interests from the utility, renewable, environmental, energy efficiency, and other sectors. Earlier this week the group submitted a formal proposal to the U.S. Department of Energy in response to a June 15th funding opportunity announcement for interconnection-wide grid planning and resource planning – including efforts to “facilitate dialogue and collaboration among the states.” STEPP proposes to organize a steering group composed of representatives from states, utility/electric industry, and renewable, energy efficiency, environmental, consumer and other interests from throughout the Eastern Interconnection (the power grid serving all or parts of 37 states, from Maine to Florida in the east, and from eastern Montana through Oklahoma, Arkansas and Louisiana in the West). STEPP’s proposal would ensure close coordination with regional and utility transmission planners and state regulators.

“Meeting the climate goals that science sets for us will require a complete transformation of our energy system, and bringing together diverse interests from across the nation is essential if we are going to act quickly and effectively to confront the energy and environmental crisis before us,” said *Seth Kaplan*, Vice President for Climate Advocacy for the Conservation Law Foundation. “The STEPP proposal would help overcome the substantial barriers to participation in electric system planning by assuring input from wide, varied, and expert voices from non-industry stakeholders, as well as traditional entities.”

As articulated by Congress and the President in the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, national goals to develop, integrate, and deliver new renewable and other low-carbon resources and to use low-carbon electricity to displace petroleum-based fuels from the transportation sector cannot be achieved without robust transmission and distribution networks. Collaboratively developed transmission plans which take the full range of options into account – energy efficiency, distributed generation, demand response, and smart grid technologies – while minimizing environmental impacts will facilitate more timely resolution of issues related to cost allocation and siting of these essential facilities.

“As a company actively engaged in regional transmission development, ITC has worked collaboratively in a variety of forums to plan for future system needs. We have always been advocates for a truly independent, regional transmission planning process whose outcome is not dictated by vested market participants,” said Joseph L. Welch, Chairman, President and CEO of ITC Holdings Corp. “ITC believes the STEPP process will complement and strengthen DOE’s interconnection analysis and planning efforts and will ensure that a broad range of scenarios and sensitivities are considered. Deciding what to plan for is a critically important input that deserves broad stakeholder collaboration.”

Organizations already committed to participating in STEPP include: Alliance for Clean Energy (ACE) NY, American Wind Energy Association (AWEA), Conservation Law Foundation, Environmental Law and Policy Center (ELPC), **Project for Sustainable** FERC Energy Policy, Invenergy, Midwest Energy Efficiency Alliance (MEEA), Mesa Power Group, **Natural Resources Defense Council** (NRDC), Pace Energy and Climate Center, **Union of Concerned Scientists** (UCS), Wind on the Wires (WOW), American Electric Power, and ITC Holdings Corporation.

“A number of the groups involved with STEPP have experience, expertise, and have actively participated in regional transmission planning – including scenario development – with utilities, states and provinces, and a variety of other stakeholders and can add immediate value to the Eastern Interconnection-wide transmission planning process,” said Beth Soholt, Executive Director, Wind on the Wires. “Engaging the STEPP participants early and often in the process will ensure a balanced outcome and a transmission plan that can be supported beyond the planning stage into the actual implementation phase of the plan.”

The Energy Future Coalition will serve as the lead convener of stakeholders. The STEPP proposal team, including Kearns & West, ICF International, and the National Renewable Energy Laboratory, will provide facilitation services and technical support. The proposal can be found at <http://www.kearnswest.com>.

Background

The Energy Future Coalition is a broad-based, non-partisan alliance that seeks to bridge the differences among business, labor, and environmental groups and identify energy policy options with broad political support. The coalition aims to bring about changes in U.S. energy policy to address the economic, security and environmental challenges related to the production and use of fossil fuels with a compelling new vision of the economic opportunities that will be created by the transition to a new energy economy. Reid Detchon is Executive Director of the Climate and Energy program at the United Nations Foundation, in addition to his capacity as Executive Director of the Energy Future Coalition.

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