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Montana

Official warns electrical rates could double if Intertie built

Electricity rates could more than double in Montana if NorthWestern Energy is allowed to build its proposed Mountain States Transmission Intertie, or MSTI, a Montana Public Service Commission official said. Brad Molnar, a public service commissioner, warned the Butte-Silver Bow Council of Commissioners that the line would be a bane to Montana ratepayers. He spoke Wednesday night at the council's regular meeting. He asked council for its support to intervene at the federal level and voice opposition to the impact the line would have on Montanans. About a month ago, the PSC voted 5-0 to intervene on behalf of rate payers, Molnar said. Molnar explained that connecting the MSTI line to California would put Montana in a new and more expensive market. Montana is currently paying \$48 per megawatt and California pays \$104, with those costs expected to reach \$150, he said. Molnar says Montana rate payers would be forced to pay the same California rates if MSTI is built. "There is no benefit to Montana," he said. He described the project as possibly being the greatest premeditated attack on Montana that he's ever seen. A utility spokesperson did not respond to Molnar's comments following his presentation before council. Council members took no action on Molnar's request, but said they would review his request to intervene at the federal level. NorthWestern Energy is proposing MSTI to be built between Townsend and Twin Falls, Idaho, to deliver power from future wind energy projects to more populous areas. Local landowners are seeking to move the line onto public land where it will have less impact on farms, ranches, homes and property values. Reporter Justin Post may be reached at justin.post@lee.net.

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