

Collaboration in renewable energy siting: the role of NGOs in renewable energy development in the Wind Belt

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As renewable energy development continues to grow within the U.S., it brings with it its own opportunities and challenges. In particular, there are concerns about the local environmental impacts that communities will experience at the expense of a national reduction in greenhouse gas emissions. This research focuses on the environmental planning and permitting of renewable energy projects to understand the current challenges and opportunities that exist when siting utility-scale wind and solar projects. Within the realm of environmental planning, the role of environmental non-profits has become more prominent. The literature identifies multiple ways in which environmental non-profits can contribute to the regulatory process, including: 1) being deeply embedded in the normative process that encourages compliance via public pressure; 2) contributing to the ways in which regulations are enforced; and 3) contributing research or other material as a third party to foster social learning within environmental regulations. The goal of this research is to understand the role that environmental non-profits play in the siting and planning of renewable energy development in the Wind Belt states. I conducted interviews with 16 environmental non-profit employees working for national organizations (either in the national office or for state chapters) as well as state and local organizations. For this presentation, I will be presenting the preliminary results of my qualitative analysis. I will highlight the themes identified from my interview transcripts, including the challenges non-profits currently face and the benefits they feel their organization could provide to future planning of renewable energy projects.

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