

This is a printer friendly version of an article from **DurangoHerald.com**
To print this article open the file menu and choose Print.

[Back](#)

Article published Jun 22, 2015

Feds grant local electric co-ops more control

Tri-State could appeal decision favorable to renewables



Photo by: Durango Herald file photo

A ruling by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission could give local electric co-ops such as La Plata Electric Association the ability to purchase more power from local sources. But the decision could still be appealed.

By [Mary Shinn](#) Herald staff writer

A federal decision issued last week could give La Plata Electric Association more independence to purchase electricity from more green sources.

In its decision, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission agreed with the Delta-Montrose Electric Association that small local electrical co-ops have an obligation to purchase power from certain small facilities.

The Delta-Montrose association argued it has a federal obligation to purchase power from facilities producing 25 kilowatts of electricity, regardless of its contract with Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association. The association is a wholesale energy supplier that operates in four states, including Colorado.

This decision could grant all 44 members of Tri-State including LPEA greater independence.

“We see that as being a potential benefit for all 44 members,” said Michael Dreyspring, CEO of LPEA.

It is not a final decision because Tri-State still has the ability to appeal.

“We are evaluating this ruling and the potential ramification to Tri-State,” said Lee Boughey, a spokesman for LPEA.

Right now, Tri-State co-ops can purchase only 5 percent of their power from an outside source such as solar, methane recovery or biomass generation, Dreyspring said.

This ruling could help LPEA and the rest of the state use more nontraditional sources of power.

“If we demand less power from them, they, perhaps, don’t have to dig as much coal,” said Britt Bassett, an LPEA board member.

It could also give LPEA more flexibility in negotiations than it has currently.

“We wouldn’t have to go through Tri-State to make it happen. We can negotiate whatever price we want,” said Michael Rendon, president of the LPEA board.

The use of smaller, decentralized power sources is a national trend, but it also requires greater local control of the grid and upgrades in existing infrastructure, Dreyspring said. These upgrades must happen faster to use the nontraditional power available.

“We’re seeing distributed generation take the continental shelf of the U.S. by storm,” he said.

mshinn@durangoherald.com
