

Spring 2025  
JOINT CREPC-WIRAB  
MEETING SUMMARY

INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

*The Joint CREPC-WIRAB Meeting is the premier biannual gathering of state, provincial, and federal representatives, and industry experts from across the Western Interconnection.*

*The **Committee on Regional Electric Power Cooperation (CREPC)** is a joint committee of the Western Interstate Energy Board (WIEB) and the Western Conference of Public Service Commissioners (WCPSC). Membership in CREPC is comprised of the public utility commissions and energy offices in the Western United States and Canadian Provinces. CREPC works to improve the efficiency of the western electric power system.*

*The **Western Interconnection Regional Advisory Body (WIRAB)** is a regional advisory body created by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) at the request of western governors. As such, WIRAB has the authority to advise FERC, the North American Electric Reliability Corporation (NERC), and the Western Regional Entity (i.e., then Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC)) on matters pertaining to electric grid reliability in the Western Interconnection. WIRAB's membership is comprised of a representative of each state and province with load served in the Western Interconnection.*

*The **Western Interstate Energy Board (WIEB)** provides support to CREPC and WIRAB through financial and staffing agreements. To help facilitate discussion and improve common understanding between western state governor and provincial premier advisors, public utility commissioners, and energy office officials on electricity issues, WIEB has secured federal funding through a cooperative agreement with the **U.S. Department of Energy (DOE)**, as well as financial support from the **Western Conference of Public Service Commissioners (WCPSC)** to host policy advisors and regulatory officials at the biannual Joint CREPC-WIRAB Meetings.*

*The following is a summary of the Spring 2025 Joint CREPC-WIRAB Meeting held April 2-4, 2025, in La Jolla, California. The summary includes key takeaways from the various presentations and panel discussions.*

WEDNESDAY, April 2, 2025

BEYOND BORDERS: TRANSMISSION, RELIABILITY, AND REGIONAL COORDINATION

John Hammond, Commissioner at the Idaho Public Utilities Commission, moderated this panel on regional coordination and reliability with Melanie Frye, President and CEO of the Western Electricity Coordinating Council; Sarah Edmonds, President and CEO of the Western Power Pool; and Keegan Moyer, Partner at Energy Strategies. Panelists discussed the technical complexity of cross-border challenges and emphasized the need for broad, long-term collaboration.

Moyer noted that regional coordination efforts like WEIM and WEIS took decades to develop but are now paying off, while others, such as the WREZ study, laid groundwork still relevant today. He stressed the importance of state engagement and stakeholder alignment.

Edmonds highlighted the progress and growing pains of WRAP, which offers new insights but revealed disparities in readiness among participants. She called for empathy and partnership amid disagreement and emphasized that markets cannot replace long-term resource adequacy planning.

Frye underscored increasing risks and a widening gap between supply and demand, pointing to WECC's latest assessment and forecasts of rising load. She reaffirmed WECC's role as a neutral, interconnection-wide convener and stressed that collaboration remains essential to managing growing complexity across the Western grid.

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## THE REALITIES OF WILDFIRES: SAFETY, OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES, AND FINANCIAL IMPACTS

Letha Tawney, Commissioner at the Oregon Public Utility Commission, moderated this session on wildfire risk with Mary Throne, Commissioner at the Wyoming Public Service Commission; Caroline Thomas Jacobs, Director of the Office of Energy Infrastructure Safety at the California Natural Resources Agency; Duncan Callaway, Chair of the Energy and Resources Group at UC Berkeley; and Spencer Gray, Executive Director of the Northwest & Intermountain Power Producers Coalition. Panelists discussed the growing complexity of wildfire threats, utility mitigation strategies, and financial and regulatory implications for the energy sector.

Jacobs described California's evolving approach, including voluntary safety certifications, performance oversight, and a wildfire mitigation planning framework that evaluates utility capabilities and long-term progress. Callaway noted that utility-caused structure fires have dropped significantly in California since 2019 due to operational tools like PSPS and fast trip settings, despite impacts on customer reliability.

Gray spoke to the uncertainty facing IPPs, who are exposed to wildfire-related disruptions without the protections afforded to utilities. He supported the creation of wildfire funds and emphasized the need for transparent, knowable risk standards. Panelists also highlighted the consequences of legal rulings where utilities are found liable even absent confirmed fault, affecting investment decisions and project pipelines.

Speakers encouraged utilities and regulators to enhance data systems, build detailed infrastructure registries, and improve fire weather forecasting. Throne urged a shift from blame to collaborative problem-solving, while Jacobs and Callaway stressed data transparency and preparedness as key priorities going into fire season.

THURSDAY, April 3, 2025

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## A CONVERSATION WITH FERC CHAIRMAN MARK CHRISTIE: INDUSTRY OPPORTUNITIES AND STATE SOLUTIONS

Moderated by Gabriel Aguilera of the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission, this session featured FERC Chairman Mark Christie in a wide-ranging discussion on industry challenges, regulatory independence, and the role of states in evolving market structures.

Chairman Christie emphasized resource adequacy as the most urgent reliability issue nationwide, citing soaring demand forecasts and insufficient new generation development. He underscored the importance of regulatory continuity and clear communication, noting that investor confidence and infrastructure investment depends on legal stability, not political shifts.

Drawing on his experience in PJM and OPSI, Christie urged states to secure strong roles in market governance and cost allocation, especially in multi-state RTOs. He warned against over-reliance on RTO staff and stressed the need for independent state support structures, including full-time legal and technical experts. While he acknowledged that some states thrive outside RTOs, others benefit from broader balancing authorities and regional coordination, what matters most is how governance and benefits are structured.

Christie concluded by encouraging state regulators to follow their governing statutes, advocate for consumer interests, and actively shape regional markets, particularly as policies and costs shift.

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#### FORGING STATE-FEDERAL PARTNERSHIPS FOR TRANSMISSION SITING AND PERMITTING

Moderator Janea Scott, Partner at Caliber Strategies, led a discussion on the critical need for stronger collaboration between states and federal agencies to streamline the permitting of major transmission projects. Permitting remains a major challenge to building the infrastructure necessary for energy reliability and clean grid goals. Panelists explored how federal initiatives like the Department of Energy's Coordinated Interagency Transmission Authorizations and Permits (CITAP) Program and FAST-41 help coordinate environmental reviews and expedite decision-making.

Tina Francone from DOE's Grid Deployment Office explained how DOE serves as a central hub for coordinating federal agency reviews and offers support directly to states and developers. Brant Johnson, Senior Vice President at Grid United, described his company's projects as practical examples of these new processes in action, praising DOE's role and the benefit of weekly interagency coordination calls that allow for early, flexible engagement even before project plans are finalized.

John Jenks from the Wyoming Energy Authority shared a state perspective, emphasizing how transmission projects like the Wyoming Intertie are essential to the state's economic future by enabling energy exports. He stressed the importance of avoiding added bureaucracy, simplifying processes, and building trust with small rural communities that often lack dedicated permitting staff.

Panelists highlighted successful coordination in states like Montana, where aligning state and federal environmental reviews has saved time and reduced costs. They urged states to engage proactively with federal programs and consider long-term transmission planning to position themselves for future energy needs.

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#### IBR Standards: Defining Responsibilities and Driving Action

Lea Márquez Peterson, Commissioner at the Arizona Corporation Commission and Vice Chair of WIRAB, moderated a panel on integrating Inverter-Based Resources (IBRs) into the grid, featuring Jim Robb,

President and CEO of NERC; Ryan Quint, Founder and President of Elevate Energy; and Jason Smith, Head of Onshore Transmission at Ørsted.

The panelists discussed challenges and progress in developing standards for IBRs, including batteries, solar, and wind, which are increasingly critical for grid reliability. Jim Robb highlighted common inverter failures causing major outages, the importance of advanced modeling for unpredictable events, and cybersecurity risks due to remote access. He emphasized the growing need for grid-forming capabilities and new approaches to blackstart using batteries.

Jason Smith described the lengthy project timelines and the complexities in meeting varied RTO and utility interconnection requirements. He noted the need for more consistent collaboration between planners and operators and the evolving learning curve for tuning IBR systems.

Ryan Quint focused on the challenges developers face with inconsistent standards, the risks of rapid interconnection pace, and gaps in roles and responsibilities across regulatory handoffs. He advocated for differentiated standards for legacy versus new resources to avoid diluting performance expectations.

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#### A CONVERSATION WITH FERC COMMISSIONER JUDY CHANG: NAVIGATING THE FUTURE OF ENERGY REGULATION

Commissioner Milt Doumit of the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission moderated a session with FERC Commissioner Judy W. Chang, offering an exploration of federal and regional roles in shaping the future of energy regulation in the Western Interconnection.

Chang emphasized that while FERC's core mission, ensuring reliability, affordability, and legal compliance, remains steady, evolving market dynamics require collaborative solutions. She stressed the importance of transparency and stakeholder trust in market design, advocating for rules that customers can understand and that deliver real value. She noted that while "seams" between markets are inevitable, they are not inherently problematic and can be managed effectively with shared assumptions and cooperative planning.

Doumit guided the conversation toward state-federal coordination, where Chang reflected on the need for states to have a stronger role in transmission planning, especially under Order 1920. Drawing on her experience in New England, she described the challenges states faced under Order 1000, where a lack of trust in the ISO's planning for policy-driven projects led to resistance around cost allocation. She emphasized that planning and cost allocation must go hand-in-hand and highlighted the importance of designing future scenarios that account for long-term needs.

On transmission, interconnection, and siting challenges, Chang pointed to the urgency created by load growth and backlogged interconnection queues. She discussed FERC's efforts under Order 2023 to improve the process and acknowledged the tension between state utility planning needs and the federal responsibility to ensure fair market access.

FRIDAY, April 4, 2025

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#### BREAKING DOWN TRANSMISSION SILOS: HOLISTIC PLANNING SOLUTIONS

James Lester, Senior Advisor at the Colorado Energy Office and CREPC Co-Chair, moderated a panel on breaking down transmission silos and advancing holistic planning solutions. Panelists included James

Okullo, Director of System Planning at Energy Systems Integration Group; Neil Millar, Vice President of Transmission Planning & Infrastructure Development at California ISO; Chelsea Loomis, Manager of Regional Transmission Planning Services at Western Power Pool; and Kelsey Allen, Principal Engineer at Southwest Power Pool.

Okullo described how traditional transmission planning has been conducted in separate silos, focusing individually on generation interconnection, reliability, economic, and policy needs, which often leads to inefficient and disjointed projects. He highlighted reforms aimed at integrating these areas, including better communication, expanded planning scopes to include resilience and large loads, and interregional coordination.

Millar outlined CAISO's transmission planning process, which begins with a reliability assessment, then moves into a policy-driven analysis that allows for iteration where each stage can refine or replace the previous one. This is followed by an economic analysis to identify the least-cost options for consumers, and finally, coordination with neighboring systems. While the process is undergoing adjustments to comply with Order 1920, Millar noted that no fundamentally new planning concepts are required.

Loomis focused on the challenges of inconsistent data submissions across utilities in the Western Interconnection. She highlighted the importance of coordinated data oversight both internally and externally, noting new NERC and FERC standards are helping improve data quality but take time to fully implement.

Allen discussed Southwest Power Pool's efforts to integrate transmission planning with interconnection processes to reduce study backlogs and improve cost certainty. He explained innovative cost allocation approaches based on grid contributions and benefits and described initiatives to incentivize interconnection customers to engage in long-term planning.

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## POWERING THE FUTURE: NUCLEAR ENERGY AND LARGE LOADS

Dr. Laura Nelson, Regional Engagement Lead at Idaho National Laboratory, opened the session by underscoring the urgent need for reliable, scalable energy to meet surging demand from data centers, AI, and industrial growth. While INL is deeply involved in nuclear innovation, she emphasized the broader need for system-wide planning and load understanding.

Katie Rogers, Manager of Reliability Assessments at the Western Electricity Coordinating Council (WECC), noted that WECC collects annual data from balancing authorities, but variations in what's included, due to contract timing and planning differences, create significant uncertainty. WECC forecasts a 17% increase in peak load from 2024 to 2034, with data centers being the most common and least predictable source of new demand.

Marcus Nichol, Executive Director of New Nuclear at the Nuclear Energy Institute, explained that nuclear energy offers clean, firm, and resilient power with low long-term costs. While many new projects won't come online until the 2030s, roughly 30 GW of nuclear power has been identified for potential co-location with data centers, and reopening closed plants could quickly add capacity. He outlined typical timelines for small modular reactors (SMRs), which span 8–10 years but could shorten with repeatable designs and new licensing frameworks.

Nate Hill, Head of Energy Policy at Amazon, described the company's investment in an SMR project in Washington state, in partnership with X-energy and Energy Northwest. Seeing SMRs as a mid-term solution, Amazon has taken a first-mover role, providing early capital, securing licenses, and co-developing a 320 MW project with potential to scale to 960 MW. Hill emphasized that data center growth is driving grid investment and that SMRs, while nascent, are part of a larger strategy to meet expanding digital infrastructure needs.

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## NAVIGATING THE REGULATORY PENDULUM: ENSURING RELIABILITY AND LEVERAGING COLLABORATION

Chair Hayley Williamson of the Public Utilities Commission of Nevada opened the panel by framing the discussion around how shifting regulatory dynamics impact grid reliability and planning in the West. She emphasized the importance of state collaboration and steady industry partnerships to navigate uncertainty and advance infrastructure development.

Jack Waldorf, Executive Director of the Western Governors Association, underscored that Western challenges are uniquely complex and require bipartisan cooperation. He highlighted how governors are working across party lines on federal partnerships and long-term energy strategies, such as resolutions focused on affordability, reliability, and clean energy development, including geothermal, where the West holds major potential.

Christina Hayes, Executive Director of Americans for a Clean Energy Grid, pointed to Nevada's Greenlink projects as a permitting success story. With 80% of Nevada's land federally owned, the state aligned its processes with federal reviews, expediting development. Greenlink West broke ground just three years after starting permitting in 2020. She noted that efforts like CITAP at DOE offer similar opportunities for streamlining transmission elsewhere and flagged the need to address wildfire liability caps, which are becoming a national reliability concern.

David Rubin, Federal Energy Policy Director at NV Energy, reflected on the early stages of the Pathways initiative, admitting to initial doubts about the ability of such a broad coalition, spanning CCAs, labor, independent power producers, and public interest organizations, to find common ground. Rubin highlighted the importance of early and consistent coordination among stakeholders including commissioners and advocates, and noted that this kind of engagement is resource-intensive but necessary for addressing emerging risks. On the federal side, Rubin underscored the importance of safeguarding gains from regional collaboration, warning that initiatives like the Energy Imbalance Market (EIM), while beneficial, could unravel without continued, uniquely Western cooperation.