Background Information on the Municipal Energy Agency of Nebraska and their 2022 Integrated Resource Plan

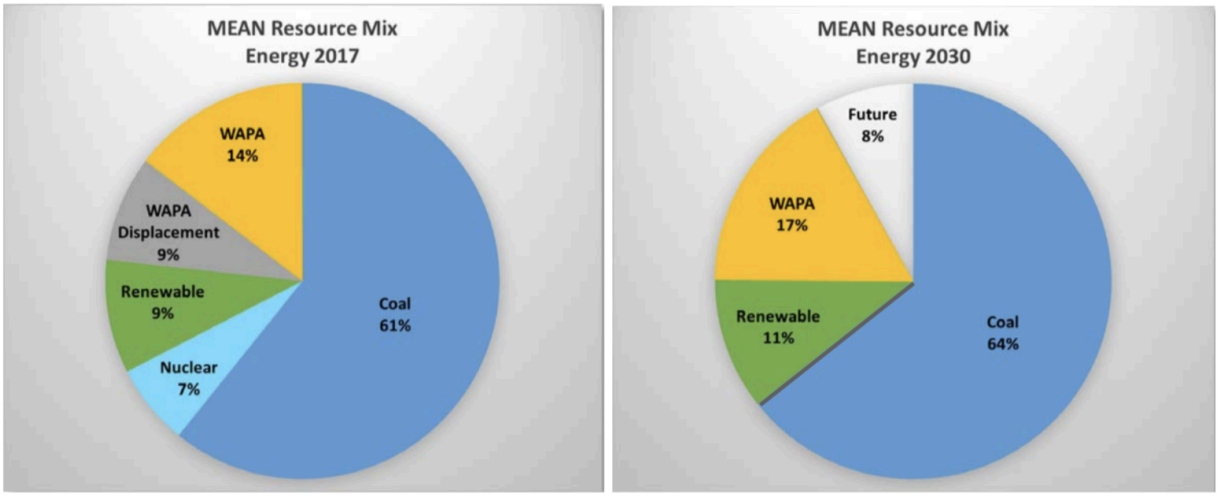
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What is MEAN?

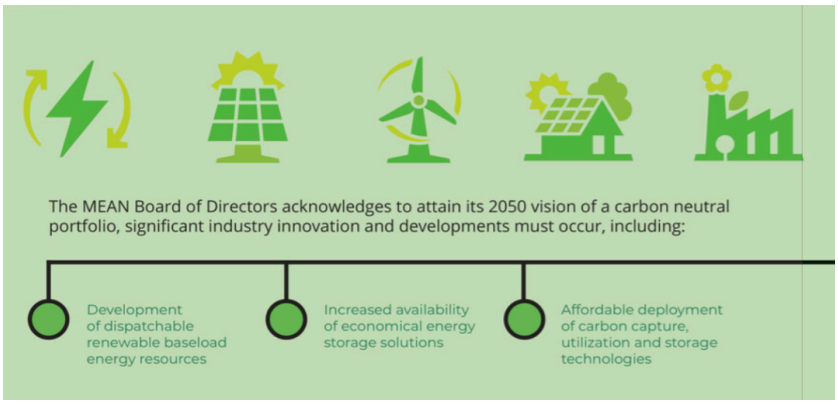
MEAN is the Municipal Energy Agency of Nebraska, a wholesale electricity supplier that services 69 communities across Nebraska, Colorado, Iowa, and Wyoming as well as the Arkansas River Power Authority. A complete list of communities served by MEAN can be found here.

What is MEAN's energy mix?

In their 2017 IRP, MEAN reported an energy mix that was heavily reliant on coal and their prediction for 2030 was to increase that reliance on coal.



Figures I-13 and I-14, MEAN's 2017 IRP



In fact, MEAN does not intend to transition to carbon neutral energy until 2050. Their 2050 vision is vague and fails to take responsibility for decarbonizing.

From MEAN's 2050 Carbon Neutral Vision, cropped for space constraints. Full version at https://mean.nmppenergy.org/means-2050-carbon-neutral-vision

What is an IRP?

An "IRP" is an Integrated Resource Plan, which all Western Area Power Administration (WAPA) customers are required to submit every 5 years under the Energy Policy Act of 1992.

> The IRP must evaluate the full range of alternatives to provide adequate and reliable service to a customer's electric consumers at the customer's or member's lowest system cost. Ideally, the planning process assesses new generating capacity, power purchases, energy conservation and efficiency, cogeneration and district heating and cooling applications and renewable energy resources. **Robust public involvement should be a part of the process, as well, allowing the utility to share upcoming challenges with its consumers and to get their input on solutions** that best address the community's diverse wishes and concerns. (WAPA)

Since the IRP 'must evaluate the full range of alternatives' to provide electricity to its customers, MEAN must evaluate renewable energy options. This is especially important given the rising costs of fossil fuel energy and the falling costs associated with renewables; "renewables are now significantly undercutting fossil fuels as the world's cheapest source of energy" (World Economic Forum, 2021)

Here is what WAPA requires in each IRP:

IRP CRITERIA

- Identify and compare of all practicable energy efficiency and energy supply resource options.
- Include action plan with timing set by customer.
- Describe efforts to minimize adverse environmental effects of new resource acquisitions.
- Provide ample opportunity for full public participation.
- Conduct load forecasting.
- Include brief description of measurement strategies for options identified in IRP to determine whether objectives are being met.

Effective July 21, 2008, WAPA approved three **additional changes** to the regulations:

- IRPs submitted by member-based associations no longer need unanimous approval of the MBA's members.
- Customers are encouraged to cooperate on preparing regional IRPs.
- WAPA will place **current customer IRPs** on its website, or provide a link to the IRP on the customer's Web site.

Click here to read WAPA's full description and criteria.

Public Participation

Note that WAPA requires its customers to provide "ample opportunity for full public participation;" we do not believe MEAN is doing so. MEAN has had five years to prepare for this process.

As explained above, MEAN intends to release a draft IRP on April 19th and plans to host an in person comment session on April 21st, just two days later. Considering MEAN's last IRP was 268 pages long, and full of technical data, we do not believe that two days in the middle of the business week is ample time for review. Further, this session will be held in Lincoln, Nebraska. MEAN services towns in Iowa, Colorado, Wyoming, and New Mexico in addition to Nebraska. By hosting a comment session in Lincoln, Nebraska (which is not even a town served by MEAN) and nowhere else, MEAN is limiting opportunities for their constituents to meaningfully participate in the IRP process.

An example of what might be done is the process being implemented by MEAN's neighbor, the Lincoln Electric System, which is also going through its IRP process: LES contemplates multiple public meetings at different locations throughout its service area.
https://www.les.com/les-integrated-resource-plan

MEAN will only accept written public input for 25 days. The comment period was going to be 30 days, but MEAN recently reduced that to 25.

Most members of the public are not utility experts; IRP documents are long, dense, and technical. We do not believe that 25 days is adequate time for the average individual to read and understand the document, formulate comments, submit them, and have them receive full consideration.

For these reasons, we urge you to join us in asking MEAN to delay their action to adopt the IRP, hold public input sessions throughout their service territory, and adequately consider all public comments.

What is SDSG?

Sustainable Development Strategies Group (SDSG) is based in Gunnison, Colorado, with collaborators in many regions of the world and collaboration space at the Posner Center for International Development in Denver, Colorado. SDSG is a nonprofit research institute that works for a future where resource development respects human rights; aligns with the economic and social objectives of local communities; and protects the natural environment.

Back in 2017, the last time MEAN adopted an Integrated Resource Plan, SDSG conducted a study on MEAN which can be found here. The purpose of this study was to "help citizens, businesses, and public officials understand the opportunities for development of more renewable electricity".

We are approaching you with that same goal today. We believe that the threat to our global climate is real, and that like everyone else, MEAN needs to be increasing its efforts to move away from fossil fuels at an accelerated pace.

What can you do to help?

- Read MEAN's draft IRP when it is released on this page on April 19th.
- Comment! If you can, attend the in person comment session in person or virtually. Information on how to join can be found here. If you cannot attend, submit written comments to MEAN.
- Talk to your municipal leaders! Make it known that your community should be pushing for a faster transition to renewable energy.
- Join our LinkedIn group, linked here, to engage in conversation about MEAN's energy mix and IRP. We can collaborate on comments, help each other understand the draft, and generally connect over this advocacy.

Additional Resources:
SDSG's previous study on MEAN: https://www.sdsg.org/mean-study
MEAN's most recent (2017) Integrated Resource Plan: https://mean.nmppenergy.org/sites/default/files/MEAN%20documents/mean-2017-irp-final.pdf
MEAN's website: https://mean.nmppenergy.org

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