

## Proposed nuclear power plant's use of Utah water debated

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SALT LAKE CITY — The head of a Utah company proposing to build a two-unit nuclear power plant outside of Green River in Emery County said the project's annual requirement of water is sustainable and a benefit to Utah residents.

Aaron Tilton, chief executive officer of [Blue Castle Holdings](#) and a former state lawmaker, outlined the project and its anticipated consumption of water before a committee of legislators Monday afternoon.

"It is a reasonable use of this water for a significant energy resource to be developed in this state," Tilton told members of the Senate Natural Resources, Agriculture and Environment Committee.

The hearing, which was for informational purposes as there was no legislation addressing the issue, comes after Gov. Gary Herbert urged lawmakers to explore nuclear power as a piece of the state's energy strategy during his State of the State address at the beginning of the 2011 session.

Blue Castle has obtained leases for 50,600 acre feet of water to be used annually from the San Juan and Kane County water conservancy districts. Change applications for the use of that water for the nuclear power plant have gone through the public hearing process, a number of protests have been filed and a decision is pending before the state water engineer.

Critics opposed to all things nuclear have lined up in opposition to the project and multiple environmental groups say the draw down on the Green River, a major tributary to the Colorado River, is an ill-advised use of a resource that is increasingly becoming scarce in the nation's second driest state.

"It is a huge step in the wrong direction bringing a nuclear power plant to the desert of Utah," said Ed Firmage Jr., stressing that water used in the nuclear power plant's generation of electricity is water that won't be available to meet demands of growing cities and towns.

But Jerry Olds, a former Utah state water engineer hired by Tilton's company to do an analysis of the project's water use, disagreed.

The water, he pointed out to lawmakers, would be diverted from a river that has an average flow of 4 million acre feet a year.

"This is below most of the major diversions along the Green River and would not impair other existing water rights in the area."

Tilton explained that the water that would be used was appropriated — but not put to use — for coal-fired power plants that were planned in the 1960s but never constructed.

"The water proposed for this is sent downstream for use by other states," he said. "It is water we don't currently use as a state."

But multiple critics that include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service say such a diversion would further compromise and cripple an already over allocated Colorado River system, posing threats to aquatic wildlife and ranching and farming interests.

The debate too, centers on the high dollar investment construction of a nuclear power plant requires and if there will be enough demand for the electricity generated, making it financially viable for consumers.

Tilton said the demand is already clearly there, adding that the company has been in talks with 18 different utility interests which represent a need for 4,500 megawatts of electricity. The plant would generate 3,000 megawatts.

The plant is years away from becoming a reality, however.

Tilton said the company is going through the pre-permitting process with the Nuclear Regulatory Commission — a process that is expected to be done by 2016. The plant would take five years to build, and wouldn't be operational until 2021.