Colorado Public Utilities Commission (PUC), a division of the Department of Regulatory Agencies, has opened an investigation seeking comment on whether it should change its oversight of Tri-State Generation and Transmission Company's resource planning process.

Tri-State, headquartered in Denver, is a non-profit generation and transmission company that supplies electric power to 44 electric distribution cooperatives in four states, including 18 cooperatives in Colorado. Under PUC rules, Tri-State submits a plan to the PUC every four years on how it will meet projected future demand.

In 2002, a previous Commission adopted rules declining to review or approve Tri-State's resource plans, which include decisions on whether and how to construct new transmission lines and power plants.

During its regular weekly meeting on Wednesday, Jan. 28, the Commission discussed the changes in the energy landscape that have occurred since 2002. These include concerns about climate change, the increased availability of renewable energy, the higher costs of power generation and the need for more energy efficiency. These major changes are motivating the PUC to re-examine its previous decision to forgo regulation of Tri-State's resource planning process.

"Today we are, in effect, starting a conversation with Tri-State, consumers, power producers and environmental interests about how to solve together the challenges we face," PUC Chairman Ron Binz said.

Binz proposed several potential regulatory approaches, ranging from the hands-off approach of the status quo, to full regulation of resource planning similar to that applied to the state's investor-owned utilities, Xcel Energy and Black Hills Power.

PUC requested that written comments be submitted by March 16. After considering the comments of interested parties and after further deliberations, the PUC will determine whether to proceed with formal changes to its rules.