

Rallying for a carbon tax

Local group works to put statewide initiative on ballot

By Laura Snider
Camera Staff Writer

A group of environmentalists is attempting to put a statewide carbon tax before voters within a couple of years, saying it would be a more effective way to reduce Colorado's greenhouse-gas emissions than voluntary efforts alone.

"The assumption that some sort of voluntary measures will get us to where we need to go is unrealistic," said Tom McKinnon, who helped organize the initiative and who will be speaking tonight in Boulder about a proposed state carbon tax.

Two price-based systems are commonly debated as methods of using market forces to reduce greenhouse-gas emissions. Of the two, a carbon tax is more controversial than its alternative, the more complex carbon-trading scheme most often called a "cap-and-trade" system.

"Most economies like carbon taxes; most politicians do not," Lakshman Guruswamy, director of the University of Colorado's Center for Energy and Environmental Security, said last month at an event to dis-

If you go

What: Colorado School of Mines professor Tom McKinnon will speak about an initiative to put a carbon tax on the statewide ballot

Where: George Reynolds Library, 3595 Table Mesa Drive in Boulder

When: 6:30 to 8:45 p.m. today

More info:
www.cleanenergyaction.org

...cuss renewable energy in Colorado.

A cap-and-trade system would allow policymakers to "cap" the total amount of greenhouse gases that can be emitted. Permits for a limited amount of carbon emissions would be issued — most likely to oil and gas industries or electric utilities — and efficient permitholders could sell permits they didn't need.

The Colorado Carbon Reduction Initiative cites price security, fairness and overall simplicity — a mechanism for collecting taxes is already in place — as reasons to support a state carbon tax instead. Such a tax could be levied at the gas pump or industry level.

"A lot of economists will tell you that if you design it right ... the tax system can work more efficiently than a cap-and-trade system," said Kevin Doran, senior research fellow at CU's Center for Energy and Environ-

mental Security. "But at the national level, people are not seriously touching the idea of the carbon tax."

So McKinnon, a professor at the Colorado School of Mines, and his allies are facing a challenge if they're going to rally the support needed to get a politically unpopular tax on the state ballot in 2008 or 2009. But McKinnon says his group is serious about making Colorado a leader for the country.

"When national policy is implemented, they look to the states for example," McKinnon said. "There's a lot of work that has to be done."

Boulder voters passed a carbon tax last year that charges residents per kilowatt-hour of electricity used. A system similar to the Boulder tax is just one of three options being explored as a model for the statewide ballot issue.

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WHAT

A waiter at the Lazy Dog sports bar to the bartender: "Are we going big screen?"

The bartender: "Let's show 'em what we got."

Then they switched on a large wall TV to show the first game of the Broncos' preseason.