



Scott Kane, owner of Creative Energies, stands in his Lander, Wyoming office.

Scott Kane - Lander, Wyoming (November, 2017)

For homeowners, there are financial savings on power bills and the benefit of the immediate increase in property value. Many people don't know it is going to increase their property value. It might take 25 years for full payoff on some systems, but it increases property value immediately.

A lot of people who get into solar are intellectually interested in the technical aspects. There are also environmental benefits. Rarely will people invest in solar for just one of those reasons, usually it is more of a package. There can also be reduction in the amount of energy it takes to cool a space since panels keep heat from the sun from hitting the roof. This is more of a benefit in the south, but does have some benefit in Wyoming.

Business owners get one substantial benefit that residential customers don't. They can claim accelerated depreciation on their solar asset, which brings down their taxes. They can claim full depreciation in about five years, with most of that occurring during the first two years. This can be worth 15-30% of the cost of installation.

The Rural Energy for America Program (REAP) grant can be claimed only by for-profit businesses, while the Rocky Mountain Power (RMP) Blue Sky program can only be utilized by nonprofit businesses. The RMP grant often pays a high percent of a total project, from 50-90%.

All taxpaying individuals and businesses can claim a 30% tax credit.

One of the greatest barriers to solar energy in Wyoming is the low cost of power. In Massachusetts, where people pay more for energy, investments in solar energy pay for themselves much faster than they do in Wyoming. Price per kilowatt has come up in Wyoming, which is making solar more attractive.

Industrial rates are still extremely low in Wyoming, which means solar on businesses doesn't make as much financial sense. Another barrier to business utilization of solar energy is the 25 kW installation limit. If we look at a typical commercial user - a hotel, a restaurant - that 25 kW limit gets reached pretty fast. National Outdoor Leadership School (NOLS) has solar installed on their main building. They are using the full 25 kW allowed, and it is only offsetting 7% of their electricity use.

The lack of any kind of state incentive is another problem for solar. Some of those are even no-cost incentives to the state, like streamlining permits or rules that prohibit covenants from preventing solar. It doesn't cost anything for states to protect solar rights.

Taking away the net-metering size cap and changing when energy production gets true up (excess energy sold back to the utility company) would make solar make sense for a lot more people. There was no reason the true-up had to be prescribed to January. If it could be changed to March, users would have the chance to use most or all of their solar credits instead of having to sell them back to utilities at a low rate. The biggest difference would be for residential customers.

Wyoming's solar industry will grow because demand grows. Colorado has around 5,000 jobs in solar, Utah has 3,000. In Wyoming, we only have around 20 people working in the solar industry. That is way lower as a percent of our population. This is an industry with a lot of room for job growth in Wyoming.

The price of solar keeps coming down. We get so excited about this! We just love charging our customers less each year. I've had people who are ready to install ask if we should go with a bid from two years ago, and I say, 'No, no!', we need a new bid because it will be cheaper!