



Gitega energy storage policy updates

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To analyze these trends and the future outlook for energy storage, Greentech Media sat down with Jason Burwen, policy and advocacy director for the Energy Storage Association, in Washington, D.C. Here's what's on the horizon for the industry.

Storage started out scrawny a few years ago but has since put on some serious muscle. The U.S. energy storage market was a humble \$111 million in 2013, but shot up to \$441 million by the end of 2015 and is expected to grow sixfold by 2021, according to the Energy Storage Monitorreport series published by GTM Research andESA.

To keep on growing, the industry needs to get its story out to more people and help push the policy conversation in a direction that creates opportunities for storage to provide flexibility, reliability and renewables integration to the grid. The White House summit, which came with a host of utility, industry and government storage commitments, indicates that the level of awareness is growing, Burwen said.

"To rise to the level of interest that the White House decides to specifically put its finger on it and say, 'This is important, we need to do something about this,' it's sort of a sign that this is no longer just the purview of energy geeks and people who do utility planning," he said.

Following the announcements, the federal government is on notice that storage is an energy priority moving forward, at least for the remainder of the current administration. In particular, the General Services Administration will put out a request for information about installing storage in place of diesel backup generators on government buildings, and the military is launching storage projects on several different bases.

The federal endorsement may prompt more people to consider storage projects for their energy needs. Raising awareness can be a slippery, hard-to-pin-down metric, but it does tackle a core obstacle to storage expansion: inertia.

"We have an electric system today," Burwen said. "It has rules. You could argue those rules could be better, you could argue reliability could be better, but at the end of the day, for the most part, the lights are on, and no one is really all that unhappy about that from a user standpoint."

Overcoming the attitude of "if it ain't broke, don't fix it" requires convincing utilities, generators and grid operators that it's worth their while to change how they do business in order to claim the prospective benefits of storage. It also means competing for attention with the other players already providing assets in the system. It's natural, for instance, that grid operators would be more attuned to the problems of a generator running thousands of megawatts of assets than to a new storage company that wants to enter a market.

“It's a standard sort of incumbent/new entrant issue, which is fine; that's how all things have to start,” Burwen said. “The case we make is that there's a lot of value here and if you're doing the looking ahead, it would be best to get this worked out sooner than when those problems will start showing up in greater intensity.”

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, which oversees U.S. energy markets, is in the midst of re-evaluating several policies that could open up more of a market for storage.

Currently, California and the regional grid PJM Interconnection (excluding New Jersey) together account for 92 percent of U.S. energy storage deployments. That's because there's a short-term frequency regulation market in PJM and incentives for self-generation in California. The storage industry is working to convince FERC to apply changes such as these more broadly.

Burwen pointed to three particular FERC dockets that have the potential to improve the market. The storage docket deals with barriers to market entry. The interconnection docket looks at the physical process of connecting storage to markets. And the price formation docket examines what a flexible resource like storage can get paid to do.

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