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Colorado Ahead of the Curve for Renewable Energy Production

November 29, 2010

ALAMOSA, Colo. - A new solar plant is helping Colorado get ahead of the curve when it comes to renewable energy. The state will soon be home to a 30-megawatt plant near Alamosa; construction is set to begin early next year. The installation would be the world's largest such solar plant.

Larry Schweiger of the *National Wildlife Federation* says the vision for the privately-funded plant was spurred by state lawmakers, who required that a fixed percentage of Colorado's energy output come from renewable resources.

"The challenge as we go forward is to make sure we do these things in a way that is environmentally sensitive. Let's not repeat the mistakes we made with fossil fuel. And I think we can do both."

The plant is on private land in San Luis Valley. This month, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management set up a "fast track" process that could clear 34 similar projects in six western states by the end of the year, making them eligible for economic stimulus funding.

Schweiger recommends placing wind and solar plants carefully so as not to do environmental damage.

"The important thing is that the electricity generated by this new facility will be carbon-free and will make life better."

He says the benefits of using renewable resources include less asthma and clearer skies.

Critics, including some research scientists and think tanks such as the Cato Institute, claim it isn't cost effective to spend government resources on renewable energy projects. Schweiger disagrees, noting that oil and gas companies also benefit from federal incentives, so government support for solar and other new technologies amounts to just leveling the playing field.

The Alamosa plant is scheduled to be operating by the end of 2012.

Kathleen Ryan, Public News Service - CO



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