

Final Approval Paves Way for State's Largest Private Solar Array

CARBONDALE — The Clean Energy Collective (CEC) has received final FAA approval for a utility-scale solar array located on a 5-acre parcel at the Garfield County Airport in Rifle.

Reported by Ann Rascalli

This solar array will be the second community-owned clean energy facility in the CEC's portfolio, and the largest private array in Colorado.

Its gives the CEC a green light to begin construction on the 1.5 MW array and, more importantly, begin taking reservations from Western Slope residents and businesses ready to make the switch to clean, affordable renewable energy.

The otherwise unusable south-facing hillside site will be used to house approximately 6,500 solar panels, producing 2,250 MWh of clean, renewable energy each year, owned by and serving as many as 500 CEC members.

In a program that's the first of its kind in the nation, the Clean Energy Collective model allows Holy Cross Energy customers to collectively buy into a community-based renewable energy facility and reap the benefits without having to build a system of their own. It also offers members the same tax credits and rebates as those who put solar panels on their homes or businesses. Members leverage their collective purchasing power to buy as much clean energy as they choose at reduced prices, and are directly credited on their electric bills.

The CEC's pilot facility—the 77.7kW Mid-Valley Metro Array in El Jebel, Colorado, the first member-owned community array in the nation—began delivering clean power to members in August of this year.

At nearly 20 times the size, the Garfield County Array represents a significant leap for the community-owned model. “It substantiates for us and everyone else involved that this is the future. It's sort of a ‘coming out’ for community arrays, proving that the

concept can be done on a very large scale.” says CEC founder Paul Spencer.

“Given the success of the first site, the magnitude of the Garfield County Array will bring greater awareness and tangibility to the model, and be a great benefit to Holy Cross,” says Steve Casey of Holy Cross Energy, which provides power to most Roaring Fork and Vail valley consumers. “People will say, ‘My goodness, larger is better!’ Casey adds.

According to CEC, membership in its first array sold out in a few weeks, and the company expects reservations in the Garfield County Array to get snapped up quickly.