

The new 5-acre, 858-kilowatt Garfield Community Airport Solar Array that opened for business earlier this week in Rifle, Colo., is the largest community solar project of its kind in the country, according to a release about it.

The array, which was developed by the Clean Energy Collective in Carbondale, Colo., will provide more than 1.5 gigawatt hours of electricity each year and will service 350 members who buy into the project and can enjoy solar power without having to own their homes or have suitable roofs or substantial land for installing panels on their own property.

The project, situated in rural Rifle, a town at the epicenter of natural gas and other fossil fuel extraction efforts, seems like an unusual setting for such a progressive project. But the town has welcomed this array along with several other recent city-owned solar installations, said Mayor Keith Lambert.

Lambert spoke at the opening of the new community solar array along with former Governor Bill Ritter.

“Our ability to move to a clean energy economy in Colorado is a product of the public’s will and the political will that the people of the state have to really try and find clean energy solutions,” Ritter said. “This is a way for people to be able to have affordable power and to be able to participate and feel good about how they’re generating their energy.”

This is the second major community solar project put together by the Clean Energy Collective in the Roaring Fork and Colorado River valleys. The first project, located in Carbondale, was a major success.

The project coordinates with Holy Cross Energy. Holy Cross and Xcel Energy crisscross the region, with one provider servicing one side of a major road and the other on the other side.

That is the case in Rifle as well. Most of the town’s population is located on the north side of Interstate 70, but the array and the Holy Cross customers who will be able to buy panels in it are on the south side.

“I’m jealous that it’s in the Holy Cross service area,” Lambert said. “And I’m jealous that I’m not in the Holy Cross service area.”

The Clean Energy Collective is hoping to be able to pursue community solar gardens with Xcel in the future.