

thedailygreen

<http://www.thedailygreen.com/environmental-news/latest/solar-community-garden>

The First Solar Community Garden in the U.S.

National Solar Tour Spotlight: Roaring Fork Valley, Colo.'s first-of-its-kind community-owned solar garden.

By Terri Steele



The 2010 National Solar Tour, organized by the American Solar Energy Society, is Saturday, Oct. 2.

Colorado's Roaring Fork Valley is sowing some palatable solar insights in the communities of Carbondale, Aspen, Vail and Eagle this weekend. The region's Clean Energy Collective (CEC) is showcasing the nation's first community-owned solar garden, the Mid-Valley solar array.

solar community garden

National Solar Tour

array features 340 solar modules that collectively boast 77.7 kW of available renewable energy production capacity to offset the energy demands of those in neighboring communities who buy into the program.

Colorado is on the front lines of legislation and execution of the ground-breaking solar farm model, which began delivering power to members in El Jebel, Colorado in August. The Clean Energy Collective is a member-owned cooperative venture that builds, operates and maintains large-scale community-based facilities that deliver clean, renewable energy to community-based

Sited on otherwise unusable land owned by the Mid-Valley Metropolitan District, the Mid-Valley solar

owner/members within specific utility service territories.

Both year-round and seasonal residents of the Roaring Fork Valley are qualified to buy individual portions of the array for as little as \$725 per panel, or \$3.15 per kW. Local utility coop Holy Cross Energy will then credit members' utility bills directly each month at the rate of \$0.11/kWh. Compensation is commensurate with how many solar modules each member owns in the community garden array. The owners of this community owned solar garden have essentially turned grey dirt into pay dirt as they create a more sustainable energy future.

Holy Cross Energy CEO Del Worley is enthusiastic about the potential. "It's great to get local renewable energy off the ground, and this is one more arrow in our quiver for Holy Cross to meet its 20% goal of renewable energy by 2015," he said.

"We are extremely thankful to our partner Holy Cross Energy for continuing to execute on its commitment to clean energies and collaborating with us on this innovative initiative," added CEC founder Paul Spencer. The CEC predicts this breakthrough will increase the region's solar adoption by 67% in the next five years.

The interconnection of the Mid-Valley solar array is a satisfying milestone on the arduous journey to empower communities with the ability to collectively own clean energy facilities from which they can directly benefit. Solar, wind, biomass and micro hydro all qualify for Clean Energy Collective status.

Several additional community solar arrays are in the build/approval process, including a 900 kW facility in Rifle, CO and a 2 MW facility near Vail. The Vail array will be the largest privately-owned solar array in the state.

"Colorado is leading the nation when it comes to attracting industry, attracting innovation, and attracting technology. This is one of the most important parts of it. We actually have mechanisms now to make renewable energy affordable to all households," said Colorado Senator Gail Schwartz.

Regardless of the renewable energy source, these are seeds worth collectively sowing.