

Vail Electric Co-op Works with New Energy Collective to Up Renewables



Holy Cross Energy, an electric co-op that serves the Roaring Fork Valley in central Colorado, is working closely with a company bringing almost 1 megawatt of solar energy into the electric grid on the Western Slope. A Carbondale company is building a new type of facility that is the first of its kind in the nation.

The Clean Energy Collective is building the largest privately-owned solar panel array in the state on 3.4 acres of airport land in Garfield County. The land will be used for up to 4,000 solar panels producing 900 kW of clean, renewable energy, owned by and serving as many as 400 CEC members. The panels are expected to be installed by mid-summer and producing energy for members by September.

The CEC concept is simple. The model allows local utility customers to collectively buy into a community-based renewable energy facility and reap the benefits without having to build systems of their own. It also offers members the same tax credits and rebates as those who put solar panels on their homes.

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. In short, thanks to proprietary software and careful attention to legal, tax, monitoring and billing issues, it gives anyone who buys electricity in Colorado's Roaring Fork and Vail valleys the option to shift to clean, affordable energy.

"This again is momentous," says Spencer, adding that it's expected to double the region's solar adoption in the next three years. "It represents the future of clean energy. Our model makes solar available to absolutely everyone, including renters, those with reduced incomes and homeowners in solar-challenged locations."

The model is also a win-win for the local utility. "One of its benefits is a utility-scale community system fully integrated with the utility that's perpetually operated and maintained," says Steve Casey of Holy Cross Energy. "The CEC model provides a unique vehicle for our members to participate and enjoy the benefits of renewable energy generation."