



State begins review of solar project east of Barstow

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BARSTOW • The California Energy Commission is beginning to review a large-scale solar project proposed for construction in the desert east of Barstow.

The Stirling Energy Systems Solar One project, if completed, would generate a projected 850 megawatts of electricity to power about 600,000 homes per year in Southern California at peak hours, through about 34,000 solar dishes. Southern California Edison has agreed to purchase the output from the plant, according to information provided by Stirling.

The project would create a 300 to 700 jobs during construction and 100 to 125 permanent jobs once complete, said Janette Coates, communications manager for Tessera Solar, Stirling's project development company.

The facility would use a technology known as the SunCatcher system developed by Stirling, involving curved mirrors that collect and concentrate solar energy into a specially designed engine, with each dish generating about 25,000 watts of power.

Coates said the SunCatcher uses less water than other thermal electric solar technologies, requires minimal grading and trenching and no excavation, has a high sun-to-grid efficiency, and does not emit greenhouse gases.

The project, which would be sited on federally-manged land, requires environmental review and approval from both state and federal agencies. The California Energy Commission and Bureau of Land Management will work together on separate portions of the review process.

The energy commission review officially kicked off Thursday, after the commission voted to accept Stirling's application for certification as having enough data. The Barstow BLM office is awaiting approval from the state BLM office on Stirling's development plan and will then begin preparing an environmental impact statement, said Barstow BLM office environmental coordinator Edy Sehafer. She expected to receive approval on the development plan from the state by the end of May.

The energy commission review process is typically a year long but could take longer, since the commission is currently inundated with three times the normal volume of energy project applications, spokesman Percy Della said.

The Solar One project will probably not be impacted by a proposal from U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein, D-Calif., who has said she plans to develop legislation that would turn large swathes of former railroad lands in the Mojave Desert into a national monument, potentially putting portions of it off limits for solar projects.

Seehafer and Coates both said the Solar One project lies outside of the tentative boundaries of the proposed monument.

Another Stirling project, a 550 megawatt project known as Solar Three, proposed for construction near Newberry Springs, is in earlier stages of the application process and is also outside of the proposed monument boundaries, but future solar projects that Stirling is considering could be impacted by Feinstein's proposal, Coates said.

Stirling has been in touch with both Feinstein's office and the Wildlands Conservancy, which initially donated or negotiated the purchase of much of the former railroad lands in question to the BLM, Coates said.

Stirling Energy Systems and Tessera Solar Solar One project

- A proposed 850-megawatt solar generation project on about 8,200 acres, approximately 37 miles east of Barstow.
- Would generate power for about 600,000 homes in Southern California at peak hours.

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