

NAVAJO TIMES

DINÉ BI NAALTSOOS

THURSDAY
August 03, 2017

Tribal utility launches renewable energy program

BY TERRY BOWMAN
NAVAJO TIMES

FORT DEFIANCE — Navajo Tribal Utility Authority is launching its Renewable Energy Program with the goal of powering the Navajo Nation with wind and solar projects.

According to NTUA, the \$60 million Kayenta Solar Project makes Navajo the first among all Native Nations to develop a utility-scale solar farm.

The Kayenta solar facility is owned by NGL-Kayenta Inc., a wholly owned subsidiary of NTUA, and is providing power to the transmission grid of Kayenta for its residents.

The solar farm produces 27.3 megawatts of electricity and consists of 119,301 photovoltaic panels on a single axis tracker that follows the sun on a daily basis.

The plant's output is enough energy to power 13,000 homes, according to NTUA General Manager Walter Haase.

Haase said the solar plant is expected to run for 25 years and is expected to produce 1,900 gigawatt-hours (GWh) of energy in that time.

"We are working on getting wind and solar as a main source of electricity in the future," said Haase at NTUA headquarters.

The project started in April of 2016 when NGL-Kayenta Inc., contractor Isolux Corsan and tribal leaders including Navajo Nation President Russell Begaye, Speaker Lorenzo Bates, Resources and Development Chairman Alton Joe Shepherd and Council Delegate Nathaniel Brown broke ground north of Kayenta.

"It's a good investment for the community and community members," said Kayenta Chap-

ter President Stanley Clitso. "We'll see the benefits in the short run and long run."

Clitso said the chapter drafted a resolution for the solar farm and the residents voted to have it built in their community.

The Kayenta Solar Project is the second U.S. solar power plant constructed by Isolux Corsan. The company has constructed photovoltaic solar plants in more than 35 countries across the globe, according to Isolux Corsan.

NTUA also helped install the \$27,000 solar panel and new office building at the Tsehootsoo Medical Center.

NTUA wants to bring renewable energy, specifically off-grid solar power, to around 2,000 families on the Navajo Nation with a cost estimated at \$58 million, according to NTUA. The project is proposed for a three-year period and the projection includes the cost for hand-wiring and Navajo Nation sales tax.

If funding is approved, this could add 19 jobs and 24 additional jobs during the three-year installation period, according to NTUA.

NTUA predicts the project will generate around \$2.8 million in tax revenue, which should sustain seven additional jobs per year or 21 jobs over the three-year period within the Navajo Nation government.

The taxes are estimated to provide \$553,000 of funding for economic development and \$276,000 in funding for the Navajo Nation scholarship program, according to a report by NTUA.

During the construction of the solar farm, more Diné employees were hired over any other ethnicity.

"We wanted local residents to have the opportunity to work and learn solar plant construction," said Haase.

Deenise Becenti, NTUA government and public affairs officer, said over 500 people attended the one-day job fair held by NTUA to hire Diné employees.

NTUA employment stats indicated a high employment rate of Navajo workers during

construction of the project.

In January, Navajo accounted for 68.42 percent of the 114 employees. During the height of construction in February, Navajos accounted for 76.47 percent of the workforce out of 255 employees total. In April as the project was nearing completion, Navajos accounted for 54.23 percent out of 59 total employees.

Haase and Becenti said NTUA is looking into more solar and wind projects to boost up the renewable energy program and eventually lease "Navajo" energy to surrounding areas.

As the lease extension agreement takes effect for the Navajo Generating Station, the tribe will gain ownership of two transmission lines capable of transmitting 500 megawatts through a portion of Arizona.

"This presents an opportunity for NTUA to expand its renewable energy development and the opportunity to sell electricity on the open market," stated Speaker Bates in a guest column he wrote for the Navajo Times.

While NTUA is trying to develop more renewable energy sources, the Salt River Project has agreed to a two-year contract with NTUA to purchase "renewable-energy credits" to help Phoenix's utility sustainability goals.

A renewable-energy credit is "a paper marker representing the environmental benefits of alternative energy," according to NTUA. The credits can be bought and traded from the electricity generated from solar panels, wind farms and other renewable-energy projects.

"We're producing renewable energy, while selling brown energy to SRP," said Haase.

The energy NTUA sells to SRP goes Pinnacle Peak near SRP headquarters, according to

Haase.

Western Area Power Administration in Phoenix also benefits from this endeavor and are partnering with NTUA in its renewable energy endeavor.

While SRP buys attributes from the Kayenta Solar Project, the Navajo Nation benefits by using its renewable energy to power itself.

"I think it's positive for the younger generation — they go off and find more ways to benefit the community," said Clitso.

He added he hopes other Diné communities will follow this trend to help provide power their community members.

"Most of all, the local people of Kayenta will benefit from this project," added Haase.

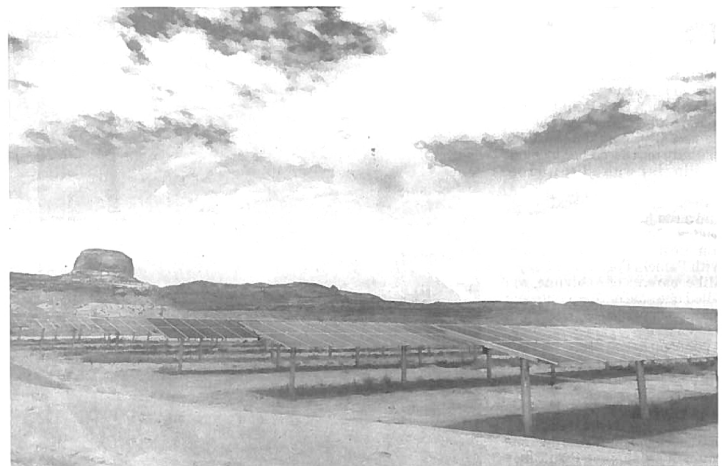
Right now NTUA is looking at 4,000 acres near Lechee, Arizona, for a possible solar or wind farm.

Haase said he would like to thank the Navajo Nation government as they were a huge helping hand in establishing projects such as the solar farm and solar panel near the Tsehootsoo Medical Center.

"We are not opposed to renewable energy," stated Bates, "but we know that it takes time to transition and that we must maintain a balance between coal energy and renewable energy as we transition between now and 2019."

NTUA finalized an agreement with the Navajo Nation Community Development Block Grant program to extend services to 92 families. The CDGB application process began in 2015, according to NTUA.

In February of 2016, the Navajo Nation and NTUA were notified by the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development the CDBG funding was granted for the project.



A view from north of the solar plant on the outside of Kayenta, Arizona.

NAVAJO TIMES | DARRIEN CLITSO