



My Turn

Community solar, part of the solution

MARY EMERY

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Every morning, I shuffle to the kitchen, turn on the lights, the radio, and start the coffee.

Electricity reliably enables my morning ritual. But it bothers me to think that every time I flip on a light switch, I cause dirty fossil fuels to be extracted from the ground, burned, and exhaust CO₂. Did you know that coal is the primary fuel used to generate the electricity Taos consumes? My family does live in a solar house, but I can't be complacent. I am compelled to do more to help prevent climate change.

In the American Southwest, abundant with sunshine, it seems criminal to burn fossil fuels for the majority of our power, relying on energy technology developed in the 1850s. The fossil fuel industry has access to five times the fuel any estimate analyzes as safe for the planet. Fossil fuel producers intend to sell it all and burn it all, without regard for the consequences to our earth. As long as we keep buying it, that is.

Taos' rural electric cooperative, Kit Carson Electric Cooperative, is a model in developing renewable energy sources. We applaud it for constructing solar arrays throughout their service area, building many quiet new solar generation facilities, and thereby contributing clean electricity to our power grid.

However, in these very efforts, KCEC ever more quickly reaches the annual limit of 5 percent of renewables (so tiny!) that their contract with Tri-State permits them to produce.

Tri-State and Plains Electric are the coal generation and distribution guys. The "free market" is not so free.

Inefficient buildings are a leading contributor to greenhouse gasses. So, in 2009 I volunteered for the building committee assigned to construct a new gym for Taos Charter School. Along with contractors and designers, we worked to create the most energy efficient building possible. Part of the plan was a solar array at the school (which would also teach students about renewable energy).

Since I wrote to you last spring, a new community solar array has been completed atop the carport at TCS. It is a 100 KW array, with 420 solar panels, at 235 watts each. This past summer, engineers, scientists, designers, and investors from the Clean Energy Collective gathered to create an innovative concept in centralized power production: the array at TCS

(constructed by the local company Sol Luna Solar) came online on Aug. 28 and will power 20 homes for the next 50 years.

The concept of community solar is novel: panels are for sale to the public instead of being owned by the utility company. Think of each panel as a little energy company. The electricity each panel generates is fed into the electric grid, and then sold to KCEC customers. As a panel owner, you are paid in electricity credits for the value of the electricity your panels generate.

Anyone in the Kit Carson service area can own panels and receive monthly credits on their bill. You can own one or as many panels as it takes to offset your average electricity use. Because you own the panels instead of the co-op, it also doesn't count against the KCEC 5 percent limit!

Commercial accounts in Rate 3 benefit particularly well, because the purchase price is depreciable. Maintenance is included, so individuals are never responsible for the repair, cleaning, or replacement of their panels. Because the panels are in a centralized location, nothing is installed on the roof of your home (maybe too shady for solar collection anyway).

So far, I've purchased only three panels, and my panels have already produced enough electricity to provide about 15 percent our home's use last month!

We must do more to halt the burning of fossil fuels. Our planet needs our help. You can participate in CO2 reduction by becoming a panel owner on the community solar array.

Find your last electricity bill, look for the bar graph for the past 12 months, and determine your average use of kilowatthours. Then go to www.kcecsolar.com for a prospectus. The Clean Energy Collective makes financing available at low interest rates. Our dollars are our votes. Keep voting to burn up the planet, or own solar and help turn the tide against climate change.

Learn more Saturday, Nov. 17 and 24 from 10 a.m. to noon, at Taos Charter School, 1303 Paseo del Ca-òn, Taos.

For more information call (575) 770-8382.

Mary Emery is a real estate broker with Century 21 Success, LLC in Taos.