

## Taos companies proposing solar array on mesa

By J.R. Logan

*The Taos News*, 12/15/2011

Two Taos-based companies are planning to build a 5,400-panel, 1.5-megawatt system solar array northwest of Taos to tie into the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative grid.

The proposal — from Blue Sky Energy, LLC — is to build a photovoltaic array on 23 acres located on the west side of Gravel Pit Road, near the Taos County Landfill.

Former Taos County manager Adam Baker, who left his post a year ago, is a founding partner in Blue Sky Energy. Baker told *The Taos News* the proposed location was ideal for an array of this size because it is on relatively level ground and will have “minimal, if any, impact” on residential properties in the area.

Baker also said the location had good access to co-op infrastructure, making it “ripe for future development.”

Co-op CEO Lu's Reyes said Tuesday (Dec. 13) the location of the Blue Sky array would help balance the electric load there and provide power for increasing development in for Las Colonias. If all permits are approved, Baker said construction would begin next spring with the array online by July 2012. Blue Sky is requesting a “major development permit” from Taos County to build the array. The Taos County Planning Commission was scheduled to consider the plan Wednesday (Dec. 14), after press time.

Baker said the array was expected to cost \$6 million in construction expenses, excluding the land purchase costs. Documents included in an application turned in to the Taos County Planning Department show that the company recently purchased parcels of land for the array from Rose Gutiérrez and José Alvarez C. de Baca.

Baker said Blue Sky was developing and financing the project, and the company's general construction contractor is Taos firm PPC Solar, whose president and CEO Dan Weinman, is a Blue Sky partner. “Our goal was to locally develop this project so that the money stays here and benefits the local labor force,” Weinman told *The Taos News*.

Weinman said the family owned PPC Solar “grew up” doing small residential systems, and has gained greater expertise by working on larger projects – a photovoltaic array at UNM-Taos in 2009 – part of a broader solar initiative being pushed by Kit Carson Cooperative. Baker said the co-op's embrace of renewable energy was part of Blue Sky's project pitch.

“Our intention was to approach Kit Carson knowing they were investing in renewable energy and that their members generally supported it,” Baker said, adding that one project goal is

developing a solar model that can be sold to other member-owned cooperatives across the state. Under existing state law, co-ops will be required to use at least 15 percent renewable energy by 2015.

Kit Carson Electric Cooperative has approved a conditional purchase agreement to buy all power generated by the proposed Blue Sky array for the next 25 years. Reyes said that deal was recently given the approval by the co-op's power supplier, Tri-State Generation and Transmission.

The co-op's Tri-State contract limits the amount of renewable energy the co-op can produce on its own to 5 percent. With the addition of the Blue Sky Array, as well as other near Amalia, Reyes said the co-op was "inching toward that limit."