

Tri-State embraces renewables

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The supplier of electric power to Socorro Electric Cooperative announced last week that it is committed to being 50 percent renewable in five years and will be shutting down a coal-fired power plant and coal mine as part of its Responsible Energy Plan.

Westminster, Colorado-based Tri-State Generation and Transmission said in a press release the move toward the renewable sources is in response to state laws and goals in New Mexico and Colorado as well as pressure from its member cooperatives and renewable energy advocates for its reliance on coal.

In recent months two of Tri-State's member cooperatives - Kit Carson Cooperative out of Taos and Delta-Montrose Electric Association in Colorado - have severed their relationship with the cooperative of cooperatives, and two more in Colorado - United Power and La Plata Electric Association want to do the same.

The three Colorado cooperatives echo Kit Carson's grievance in saying that they wanted to build more local renewable energy than Tri-State allows and purchase cheaper wholesale power.

The utility will end its coal-fired power generation statewide to transition about half of its consumable energy to renewable sources by 2024.

For the first time, four solar projects will be located on the west side of Tri-State's system, including near Escalante Station and Colowyo Mine, which are scheduled to close by the end of 2020 and by 2030, respectively.

"With the retirements of all coal facilities we operate, a commitment to not pursue coal in the future, and a significant increase in renewables, Tri-State is making a long-term and meaningful commitment to permanently reduce our greenhouse gas emissions," Tri-State's CEO, Duane Highley said.

He said they have already contracted with Turning Point Energy for a 200-megawatt Escalante Solar project near Prewitt, New Mexico. Prewitt is on Interstate 40 between Thoreau and Grants.

Escalante Solar is scheduled to come online in 2023 and is one of six new renewable projects which include Axial Basin Solar, Niyol Wind, Spanish Peaks Solar, Coyote Gulch Solar, Dolores Canyon Solar, and Crossing Trails Solar; all located in Colorado.

Tri-State expects these and other wind and solar projects would provide enough renewable power to serve 850,000 homes when completed.

Tri-State serves 43 electric associations in Colorado, Wyoming, New Mexico, and Nebraska.

Socorro Electric Cooperative is currently held to a 50-year contract with Tri-State.