

Tri-State expands community solar

By John Larson, El Defensor Chieftain staff writer

http://www.dchieftain.com/news/tri-state-expands-community-solar/article_6a4f8734-0b20-11ea-bc0e-af4cd953ea9d.html

Tri-State Generation and Transmission announced last week its support for community solar programs, which it says will give rural electricity consumers expanded opportunities to reduce their power costs. Socorro Electric Cooperative is under contract with Tri-State for the electricity it delivers to members.

According to the U.S. Dept. of Energy, a community solar project - sometimes referred to as a solar garden - is a solar power plant whose electricity is shared by more than one property. The primary purpose of community solar is to allow members of a community the opportunity to share the benefits of solar power even if they cannot or prefer not to install solar panels on their property. Project participants benefit from the electricity generated by the community solar farm, which costs less than the price they would ordinarily pay to their utility.

In a press release, Tri-State's CEO Duane Highley said, "Our members are working together to create more flexibility for local renewable power generation. Expanding opportunities for co-op members to participate in community solar is another step toward that goal."

Tri-State's board of directors approved the new program at their November meeting.

The community solar program supports member-owned or controlled solar photovoltaic systems, which are marketed to cooperative retail consumer-members under subscription arrangements. Consumers can participate in community solar projects and gain the benefits of clean energy and lower power costs, regardless of the orientation or location of their home.

Poudre Valley Rural Electric Association presented and advanced the community solar proposal through the membership's Contract Committee. The northern Colorado distribution cooperative has three community solar projects for its consumer-members.

"Community solar provides every co-op consumer-member with the opportunity to go solar, and now more consumers will have the option to benefit from clean, low cost solar power," said Jeff Wadsworth, CEO of PVREA and a member of Tri-State's Contract Committee.

The Contract Committee of Tri-State's membership continues to review options to allow members with more flexibility for power supply, including partial requirements contracts and additional local renewable energy.

Solar generation under the program will not be included in the five percent self-supply provisions agreed to by members in their wholesale power contracts with Tri-State. Tri-State's total commitment to the program, if acted upon by all members, would be 63 megawatts of community solar projects.

Currently, approximately 31 percent of the electricity consumed by Tri-State's members comes from renewable resources. With the addition of two recently announced projects, Tri-State's wind and solar resources will be increasing by an additional 45 percent. This increase in renewable generation allows Tri-State to serve the equivalent of more than a half a million rural homes with renewable resources. TriState will further increase that amount from our sixth renewable energy request for proposals, which was released in June 2019.

Tri-State is a cooperative of 43 member electric cooperatives and public power districts in four states, including Socorro Electric Cooperative.

