



2.5 MW Black Cap solar array in Lakeview, OR | Kelli Roemer

## A Case Study: Creating Community Support to build Lake County's New Natural Resource Economy

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### Lake County, OR

Lakeview, the seat of Lake County, is located in south central Oregon in the Goose Lake Valley at the foot of the Warner Mountains and on the edge of the southeast Oregon High Desert. The landscape surrounding this tall town can vary greatly from high-plateau to high desert ecosystems typical of the Northern Great Basin. To the west, the Fremont National Forest fills your view, a mixed conifer forest of Ponderosa Pine, Lodgepole Pine, Incense-cedar, Western juniper, and aspen trees. To the east, the semi-arid highland belt commonly known as the “Oregon Outback” displays rugged rock outcroppings and dramatic cliffs, including Abert and Winter Rim. The valleys in between vary from irrigated crop land to sage brush meadows. The area also includes alkali lakes, and unusual geologic features.

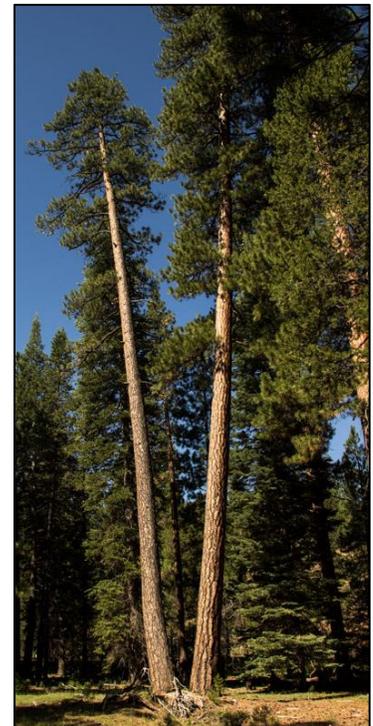
### Forest Influence

Nearly 80 percent of the land in Lake County is federally-owned, public land. This land consists of range, sage brush meadow, and mixed conifer forest. The history and economy of Lakeview is deeply tied to both the range lands and the Fremont National Forest. Both the community and the landscape advanced through the natural resource industry's booms and busts, and were particularly dependent on timber harvesting. But the timber wars of the 1980s and early 1990s effectively shut down four of five saw mills and over 800 local jobs were lost. Over the next decade, the community faced conflict and poverty.

In addition to the economic losses of the timber industry, Lakeview was forced to face forest health issues. The communities' with a large wildland-urban interface threatened community safety due to large scale tree diseases and increased threat of intense wildfires.

### Move to Collaboration

In 1998, county leadership brought together environmentalists, scientists, federal agency personnel, timber industry staff, and community members to talk and make a plan. Over the course of a few



Ponderosa pine trees on the Fremont-Winema NF | Kelli Roemer

years a forest collaborative was formed, “dedicated to restoring and maintaining the ecological well-being of the Fremont-Winema National Forest, while deriving sustainable economic benefits from its resources (Sustainable Northwest, 2014).” The goal was to revitalize a local forest industry through the creation of jobs driven by the need for forest restoration, especially with new landscape-level threats that climate change poses.



Geothermal well outside of Paisley in Lake County, OR. | Kelli Roemer

### A New Natural Resource Economy

While the community intended to revitalize their logging economy, they understood that it wouldn't be able to operate at past levels and they needed something new in order to fill the gap.

Sitting on the Abert Fault Line, geothermal energy is prevalent across the landscape, and the regional climate provides for some of the most consistent sunlight in the nation (NREL, Concentrating Solar Power Resources, 2007). Additionally, Lake County has over 1 million acres of overstocked forests that could serve as excellent sources

of biofuel and biomass. The combination of low property prices, high intensity sunlight, plentiful biomass resources, and high geothermal activity all make Lake County an ideal place to generate renewable energy and build a stable economy from clean energy development.

### Forming a Renewable Energy Working Group

In 2008, Jim Walls, Executive Director of Lake County Resources Initiative (LCRI) and a recognized community leader, was asked to be a member of the state's Renewable Energy Working Group. Privy to momentum on a state and local level towards renewable energy development, Walls sought to form a Renewable Energy Working Group in Lake County. The timing was right. A climate of trust and collaboration had been established from the Lakeview Stewardship Group's successes and community leaders were engaged and ready to pursue creative solutions to rebuild the local economy. A broad spectrum of renewable energy resources had been already identified.

Building on the successful public engagement efforts of the Lakeview Stewardship Group, interested community members and stakeholders gathered to talk about renewable energy development in Lake County. In rural areas like Lake County, community members and leaders wear multiple hats and tend to be involved in all aspects of community development. The formation of this non-membership group to play an advisory role to community leaders and interested parties, turned out to be essential to Lake County's renewable energy development efforts.

## Setting Goals and Tasks

The Lake County Renewable Energy Working Group began holding working sessions open to the public. They decided the first step was to develop a renewable energy implementation strategy. To conduct this study, LCRI hired a [Resource Assistance for Rural Environments \(RARE\) AmeriCorps](#) member, Brian Hider, to study and develop a strategy for implementation of each of the renewable technologies being considered in Lake County. During this plan's development, the working group raised funds from foundations and USDA Rural Development grants to contract a Renewable Energy Director. LCRI hired a founding member of the working group and exceptional renewable energy engineer, Bob Rogers. Rogers worked with LCRI and the sequential RARE members to begin the technical process of:

- Evaluating Lake County's renewable energy potential
- Developing implementation strategy
- Evaluate carbon offset potential
- Building community support and capacity

Lake County created a community wide goal to be the first county in Oregon to offset its abiotic carbon emissions with renewable energy and was branded as the "New Energy Frontier."

## Summary

Lake County began their renewable energy efforts after gaining success and momentum from their successful collaborative forest restoration efforts. They gathered active community members and local stakeholders to form a Lake County Renewable Energy Working Group. This group held public working sessions with initial goals and set out to develop a renewable energy development plan. Early efforts provided funds to hire a RARE AmeriCorps member to develop a strategy. Lake County's renewable energy plan and expansion in staff and technical capacity allowed LCRI to raise funds to hire a full time Renewable Energy Director. The Renewable Energy Director has since continued to work with successional RARE members, community members, agencies, and organizations to continue building towards a goal of producing more energy than we use.

## Accomplishments

- 7.5 MW of operational solar projects in Lake County.
- 100+ MW of solar projects in planning stages.
- 2.5 MW generated at the Paisley Geothermal Plant.
- 2011 economic study on Lake County renewables projects showed that 22 projects brought in \$1.9 million in savings over equipment lifetime.\*
- Developed a renewable energy implementation strategy.\*
- Developed a plan to offset abiotic carbon emissions through renewable energy.\*

\*Studies and reports can be found under the [Publications](#) tab on our website at [www.lcri.org](http://www.lcri.org)