

Contact: Tom Gauntt,
PacifiCorp, 503-813-7291

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PacifiCorp solar generation facility to shine in Lakeview

Black Cap project brightens Lake County's goal to become a renewable energy center

LAKEVIEW, Ore. – Taking a significant step in developing Oregon's solar energy potential, PacifiCorp today announced the development of a 2-megawatt solar generation project in Lake County.

When completed, the project will be the largest utility-leased solar facility in the state. PacifiCorp selected the project after a robust competitive solicitation for solar resource proposals initiated in 2011.

The Black Cap project, located a few miles from downtown Lakeview, will break ground in May on a 21-acre site and be producing electricity by October. It will produce enough electricity to meet the annual energy needs of about 400 average residential customers.

“The board of commissioners views this project as an important step towards Lake County's goal of becoming Oregon's most sustainable county,” said Brad Winters, board chairman. “The cooperation among the county, PacifiCorp and developer Obsidian Finance has been a great example of how we can all work together to make something important happen. It's been a lot of hard work, but ultimately worth it.”

“Lakeview is ideally located for solar power with more than 300 days of sunshine a year,” said Pat Reiten, chief executive officer of Pacific Power, the electric utility that has served Lakeview for decades. “The motorized tracking system underlying the 9,000 photovoltaic panels will follow the sun during the day, tilting the arrays automatically to optimize solar generation. This makes it an even better long term investment for our customers.”

The project's developer is Oregon-based Obsidian Finance Group. PacifiCorp will own the project rights and the land under the facility, but lease the equipment. The project's cost is not being released.

Swinerton Builders, which has deep experience in the solar industry and has been involved in several high profile Oregon construction projects, is the prime contractor. The inverters, which convert the solar energy to the alternating current needed for commercial use, are from the AE Solar Energy unit of Advanced Energy Industries, Inc. located in Bend, Ore.

Lake County is welcoming the facility that will bring as many as 10 construction jobs to Lakeview over the summer. “The construction employment is important to us, but the stronger significance is that Black Cap is building on our goal of making Lake County the ‘New Energy Frontier’ of the West,” said Audrey Henry, director of the Lake County Chamber of Commerce. “Other solar and biomass projects will continue the county’s success.”

Black Cap, which takes its name from a prominent local landmark, furthers PacifiCorp’s customers’ stated desire for more renewable, especially solar, energy development. In addition to building its own solar generation, the company is also purchasing solar power from local developers and encouraging residential and commercial customers to install their own solar arrays, where practical, to help tap the sun’s energy and hold down their own energy bills. The project is a major step toward PacifiCorp meeting the solar generation portion of Oregon’s Renewable Portfolio Standards law.

Black Cap is also an excellent fit with the commitment to renewable energy made by MidAmerican Energy Holdings, PacifiCorp’s parent company, which is the largest domestic owner of solar generation. In January, the newly-created MidAmerican Renewables LLC acquired the Topaz Solar Farm, a 550-megawatt photovoltaic power plant being built in San Luis Obispo County, Calif., that will have the capacity to generate enough renewable energy to power approximately 160,000 average homes. In 2011, MidAmerican Renewables acquired the 290-megawatt Agua Caliente project in Yuma County, Ariz.

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About PacifiCorp

PacifiCorp is one of the lowest-cost electricity producers in the United States, serving more than 1.7 million customers in the West. PacifiCorp operates as Pacific Power in Oregon, Washington and California, and as Rocky Mountain Power in Utah, Wyoming and Idaho. With a generating capability of more than 10,620 megawatts from coal, hydro, gas-fired combustion turbines and renewable wind and geothermal power, the company works to meet growing energy demand while protecting and enhancing the environment.