

Governor lauds first phase of clean energy project

BY COURTENAY EDELHART, Californian staff writer
cedelhart@bakersfield.com | Tuesday, May 04 2010 05:12 PM

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Images:



Henry A. Barrios / The Californian

California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger arrives at the Tehachapi Renewable Transmission Project to join Southern California Edison and celebrate the completion of the first phase of the project. Once completed the project will be capable of delivering 4,500 megawatts of green energy.



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California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger speaks to a gathering at the Tehachapi Renewable Transmission Project to celebrate the completion of the first phase of the project. Once completed the project will be capable of delivering 4,500 megawatts of green energy. Standing next to the Governor are Commissioner Dian M. Grueneich, California Public Utilities Commission, center, and Les E. Starck, vice president of local public affairs, Southern California Edison, right.



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California Governor Arnold Schwarzenegger speaks to Yakout Mansour, president and chief executive officer, California Independent System Operator during a gathering at the site Tehachapi Renewable Transmission Project. The Governor joined Southern California Edison to celebrate the completion of the first phase of the project. Once completed the project will be capable of delivering 4,500 megawatts of green energy.

Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger joined Southern California Edison executives and other dignitaries in the Mojave Desert Tuesday to celebrate finishing the first phase of a clean energy project that, when complete, should generate enough electricity to power three million homes.

The Tehachapi Renewable Transmission Project is a new high-voltage transmission line that initially will deliver about 700 megawatts from wind farms, solar panels and other sources. After two years of construction, the first three of 11 planned segments are done.

If the entire project is completed on schedule in 2015, it's expected to deliver a total of 4,500 megawatts. The 250 miles of new and upgraded transmission infrastructure would extend from eastern Kern County to the city of Ontario in San Bernardino County.

The remaining phases of the project would start later this year pending approval from federal land agencies, including the U.S. Forest Service.

Schwarzenegger vowed to see it through to the end, and joked that he's spent so much time in the desert pushing for the project that he's deeply suntanned and desert tortoises have begun speaking with an Austrian accent.

A beaming Yakout Mansour, president and CEO of California Independent System Operator, urged those gathered at the eastern Kern County wind hub to mark Tuesday on their calendars.

"One day you will look back and you will say, 'We were part of it.' This is historic," he said.

California ISO is a non-profit corporation charged with operating the majority of California's high-voltage wholesale power grid.

Ten years ago, Mansour said, "The world was learning from California what not to do. Today, the world is learning from California what to do and how to do it."

The governor has made clean, renewable energy a major pillar of his administration. Among other things, he has set a goal of obtaining 33 percent of the state's energy from renewable sources by 2020.

About two dozen renewable energy projects are breaking ground in the state this year, representing \$30 billion in investment and creating millions of new jobs, Schwarzenegger said Tuesday.

"We will be one of the top producers of renewable energy in the world," he said. "Not just the United States, because we passed that a long time ago."

California has more than 15,000 wind turbines, and 5,000 of them are in Tehachapi. That makes the Tehachapi project the world's second highest concentration of wind turbines, second only to the 7,000 turbines at Altamont Pass near the Bay Area.

The project in Kern County is expected to create more than 1,000 construction jobs.

Permanent jobs would come from the energy generators that move to the area once the delivery infrastructure is in place. You can build all the wind turbines and solar facilities you want, but they won't have much impact without the ability to deliver that energy to consumers in major population centers, Schwarzenegger said.

Even though the project is only partially complete, the transmission line is already sparking inquiries from developers, said Linda Parker, executive director of the Kern Wind Energy Association.

"This could potentially mean thousands of jobs in the area once it's complete," she said. "By 2030, the wind industry will match oil in assessments. It's a really big deal."