

## *Position Paper*

The San Luis Valley Water Protection Coalition (SLV WPC) in cooperation with San Luis Valley Ecosystem Council, and the citizens and landowners that comprise the Solar Working Group believe that it is imperative that our country makes the transition to the use of renewable energy sources. We recognize the problems associated with the extraction, production and burning of fossil fuels, and the consequences of global climate change, and believe that renewable energy can offer a clean, affordable, sustainable, and environmentally friendly alternative. We further believe that conservation efforts and lifestyle changes are a key component of this transition.

We recognize the unique and valuable aspects of the San Luis Valley. We understand that the Valley has enormous potential in the area of solar production, and has a long history of supporting solar energy on a smaller scale. We encourage the development of renewable energy strategies that will promote the long-term health and well being of the SLV community, and protect the environment, critical habitat, wildlife, sensitive corridors, and water, as well as the history and culture of this agro-pastoral community.

We understand that under the mandates of Amendment 37, and subsequent legislation passed by Colorado voters, utility providers are now working to meet their renewable energy portfolio requirements in a relatively short time frame. We want to work with the utility providers to guide development in ways that are environmentally sound, culturally and historically sensitive, create long-term economic growth for the citizens of the San Luis Valley, and minimize negative impacts to the Valley's lands, wildlife, and water resources. We also believe that there may be unique impacts for this Valley that still need to be addressed and that siting large-scale solar production outside the Valley needs to be an ongoing consideration.

We believe that the current paradigm of large-scale energy production in remote locations, and the subsequent need for large-scale transmission, may not be the best short- or long-term solution to meet localized energy needs. We therefore support the development of a vision that encourages local, small-scale, distributed generation on a national scale and recommends the siting of large-scale plants closer to areas of high energy use and within existing transmission corridors. Finally, we believe that a significant portion of local redundancy and reliability issues can be overcome by introducing diverse and nexus efficient renewable energy tools into the existing distribution system.

### **Working Group efforts will be focused in three areas:**

- 1—Influence the current energy development strategy to insure that any new transmission lines and large-scale solar production are developed in ways that are most beneficial to the Valley environment;
- 2—Work to develop a viable alternative plan that is based on resilient small-scale, community-based, distributed models of power generation as needed and increased energy efficiency first; This succession of practices is modeled by the most successful transition municipalities and National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) research.
- 3—Though our focus will remain local, we encourage interested individuals to research and develop recommendations that involve siting utility-scale development outside of the Valley.

To this end, the following sub-groups have been formed:

Group I: Siting and Construction

- a. **Mapping/siting:** Synthesize maps produced by the Center for Native Ecosystems, the BLM, FS, DOW, CNHP, TNC, and others, to create maps that show environmentally, culturally, or historically sensitive areas; work at the county level to aid county commissioners in making good siting decisions.
- b. **Transmission corridors:** Examine potential impacts of current transmission line siting proposals, and develop and promote a possible alternative route.
- c. **Research:** Research the sub-stations in the Valley, establish the amount and size of small-scale production that would need to be produced to meet local demand, look at models used in Boulder and other areas that support smart grid proposals and are not asking for visible transmission lines, and make recommendations for small-scale distributed systems. They will also look at ways to meet energy needs on a statewide level through distributed sources.

For those wishing to take siting one step further:

- d. **Alternative Siting Development:** Develop alternatives to the current plans that would establish large-scale solar **outside** the San Luis Valley closer to areas of high-energy use and within existing transmission corridors.

Group II: Maintaining traditional uses/Promotion of distributed generation

- e. **Agricultural needs:** Work with Valley farmers to find economically viable ways to meet peak agricultural demands using PV and/or hybrid systems; Enhance current agricultural energy systems.
- f. **Water Issues:** Develop recommendations with respect to water-cooled vs. air-cooled systems and the impacts of changing water use from agricultural to industrial.
- g. **Energy Efficiency & Conservation:** Examine impacts of various conservation and energy efficiency measures, develop comparative analysis, educate the public and promote the use of conservation measures in homes and businesses.
- h. **Creating financing alternatives:** Examine the ways in which California and others have financed conservation measures and individual solar projects and will work with members of the Colorado House and Senate to create a financing structure in Colorado that is viable for community-based and small-scale;
- i. **Economic viability:** Work with PUC, Xcel, the GEO, and the Colorado legislature to ensure that energy production from small-scale, distributed PV is rate-structured in a way that will level the playing field for distributed systems.

Group III: Public Process and Regulatory Impact:

- j. **Solar Energy Regulations:** Work with County Commissioners and Planning Commissions to develop and pass county regulations and permitting requirements that will protect the health and well being of SLV residents and environment. This is a lessons learned application based on the current choice of energy sources.
- k. **Public process:** Study the public process used with both Tri-State & Xcel (PSCo), as well as the PUC, to determine public meetings and public comment deadlines; report to the larger group, and help facilitate talking points and comment letters.
- l. **Political outreach:** Establish connections with members of the PUC, the Governor's Energy Office, and the Colorado State House and Senate, in order to invite participation with and understanding of SLV citizens' concerns.

- m. **Economic analysis:** Gather information from other communities that have built utility scale solar facilities, and examine employment (both short- and long-term), tax revenue, and costs associated with these plants, and compare with other solar technologies and scales.

### **GENERAL EDUCATION SUMMARY and suggested ACTION STEPS**

**Public education:** In order to better understand the impacts of large-scale solar development, a series of presentations will be made in all five Valley counties (excluding Mineral County), showing the research of the working groups. We will cooperate with various educational organizations (including public, technical, and college level) to create programs that will assist in the world literacy of efficiency and transfer to clean energy.

Because of the extreme temperature fluctuations and difficult climactic conditions, we believe the SLV could house a world-class rural institute for research in energy efficient building design and practice.

#### **To this end, the following strategy and action steps are suggested:**

1. Support of a permanent, locally based clean energy office, which would help develop SLV leadership in matters recognized within the position paper and working groups.
2. Support for effective local food sources and value added agriculture.
3. Promotion of best efficiency practice. Low emissions start with conservation practices at all levels.
4. Develop energy consumption education programs that promote sustainable practice using land that is already developed in more creative and sustainable ways.
5. Promote contemporary energy conservation and energy efficiency practices, including high efficient buildings, low energy lighting and maximum insulation, and other technologies that promote energy conservation on all levels.
6. Educate and promote mechanisms which will create local ownership, such as a local clean energy co-op which would be able to sell products at reduced cost to benefit Valley customers.
7. Establish connections with members of the PUC, the Governor's Energy Office, and the Colorado State House and Senate, and rural-oriented, diversely owned and operated non-profits in order to invite participation with and understanding of SLV citizens' concerns.
8. Establish universal high-speed technology to connect community members with each other, and with those who serve them.

#### **Goal: To begin process of a Long Term Sustainability Plan**

**Summary Statement and Risk/Reward Analysis:** Combine the findings of these sub-groups into a summary document showing risk and rewards with respect to choices in siting, scale, and type of renewable energy development.