

Oregon may turn to efficient geothermal energy

BEND, Ore. (AP) — The rest of the nation began to tap geothermal energy in the 1960s while cheap hydroelectric power fueled the Northwest. The 1990s may find Oregon looking underground for new energy sources.

Most of the major rivers already are dammed, and new hydro projects could threaten fish runs already damaged by existing dams.

Alex Sifford, an energy resource specialist with the Oregon Department of Energy, says geothermal energy may be one of the region's best bets for developing an efficient, safe and relatively clean source of electricity.

"Up here we have the cheapest electric rates in the country, so very little has been able to compete until recently," Sifford said. "Geothermal and all the other renewable energy sources are going to be brought on line."

The first project to be completed in Oregon is likely to be a \$110 million plant on the western slope of Newberry Crater, just south of Bend.

After a year of review, the federal government has given CE Exploration Co. of

Portland approval for a project on the lip of the ancient volcano.

CE Exploration plans to set up to 14 well pads within three miles of its power plant. Each pad would tap two to four wells plunging 6,000 to 8,000 feet into geothermal reservoirs. Construction should take about three years.

But the project's success depends on the temperature of the water - 350 to 450 degrees is needed - and the size of the geothermal reservoir. It could take a year or more to determine if the resource is sufficient.

From an environmental standpoint, the proposal has attracted little criticism.

"I've done projects in California and Nevada for various federal agencies before, and this review is probably as comprehensive and difficult as we've ever been through," said David McClain, CE Exploration's projects manager.

In fact, many environmentalists who have examined plans for the Newberry project, such as Dr. Jim Mahoney of Bend, are satisfied.

Mahoney, a member of the Sierra Club, represents environmentalists on a com-

munity advisory council assigned to monitor the project.

Although state Sierra Club leaders have not taken a position on the plan, Mahoney said he personally believes the project is sound.

"They've done a good job, there's no two ways about it," Mahoney said. "If you're going to do geothermal power in Oregon and have it done in an environmentally responsible manner, this is as close as you're going to come."

The plant would be partially concealed by the landscape, and would generate a small steam plume appearing as a small white cloud, McClain says.

Hot water from the wells would be cooled and re-injected into the ground, where it would rejoin geothermal reservoirs.

But one critic says trace chemicals in the hot water could pose a problem if they leached into groundwater, a few thousand feet above the geothermal reservoirs. Robert Windix of Bend worked from 1977 to 1987 at The Geysers, a geothermal field in California.

"I've been there and seen that diligence isn't always the highest priority," Windix said.

Another concern is the potential release of hydrogen sulfide, a gas that smells like rotten eggs.

Inside Newberry Crater, tiny amounts of gas leak from thermal springs at East and Paulina lakes, but much larger amounts would surface through wells.

McClain said the plant will be equipped with an emissions treatment system that will capture more than 98 percent of the gas.

Meanwhile, supporters are hoping the project will become a model for geothermal development in Oregon.

"These test projects are the most reasonable way to proceed right now," state Sen. Neil Bryant, R-Bend, a member of an advisory council for the Newberry project, said of future energy needs.

"There's a strong likelihood that power from hydroelectricity will continue to increase in price," he said. "If the salmon recovery plan doesn't work, it could really increase and also be limited."

ET ALS

MEETINGS

Landscape Architecture Studio 489/589 will hold a community design meeting for residents of Amazon student housing (NW neighborhood) tonight from 7 to 9 p.m. at the Amazon Community Room. For more information, call Stan Jones at 346-3619.

ASUO will hold a programs conference (open forum) today at 5 p.m. in EMU Cedar Room F.

RELIGION

Chi Alpha Christian Fellowship will hold a worship service and bible study tonight at 7 p.m. in Room 105 Esslinger. For more information, call 346-0910.

MISCELLANEOUS

Department of Germanic languages and literature will sponsor a Scandinavian film titled "Northern Lights" (subtitled) tonight at 8 p.m. in Room 115 Pacific. For more information, call 346-4086.

Japanese Student Organization will sponsor a Japanese language table today from 4:30 to 5:30 p.m. in Room 115 Pacific. For more information, call 343-0082.

Oregon Humanities Center will sponsor a lecture/demonstration by Cheryl Marshall, soprano, and Caroline Almonte, pianist, on "Collaborations between Singers and Composers: Ideas regarding Techniques and Interpretation," today at 4 p.m. in the Geringer Alumni Lounge. For more information, call 346-3934.

Career Planning and Placement Service will sponsor a presentation by PetsMart tonight from 6 to 7 p.m. in EMU Century Room A.

Career Planning and Placement Service will conduct an interview workshop today from 3 to 4:30 p.m. in EMU Cedar Room F.

Career Planning and Placement Service will conduct an office orientation today from 3 to 4 p.m. in Room 221 Hendricks.

Career Planning and Placement Service request that bid cards and resumes be submitted today through Wednesday in Room 244 Hendricks for interviews with the following organizations: Frito Lay, Timberline Software, PIRG, ARIS, Montgomery Ward, Olde Discount Corp. and The Prudential.

Deadline for submitting Et Als to the Emerald front desk, Suite 300 EMU, is noon the day before publication. Et Als run the day of the event unless the event takes place before noon and is requested to be run earlier. Et

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