

Van Vleck ranch to add big solar power plant

Rick Daysog, Sacramento Bee, 8-31-10

Throughout its 156-year history, the Van Vleck Ranch in east Sacramento County has been used for gold mining, cattle ranching and even paintball battling. Now owner Stan Van Vleck hopes to tap into a new profit center: solar power.

The ranch, one of the largest in the Sacramento region, is partnering with San Francisco-based ClearPeak Power LLC to build one of the largest solar farms in the state on 100 acres of ranch land near Rancho Murieta.

The solar project aims to create between 100 and 200 new green jobs and to produce about 15 megawatts of power – enough to power 3,000 homes.

"This is something that we're excited about," said Van Vleck, who is president of Van Vleck Ranch Inc.

The planned development comes as government officials in the Sacramento region have rolled out the green carpet for the solar and clean-tech industries.

Since the passage of the state's landmark global climate change law in 2006, Sacramento has been among the leaders in the state for attracting green energy jobs.

Van Vleck, who unveiled his plan Friday at the Sacramento Metro Chamber of Commerce's annual state-of-the-region forum, said the solar project will take about two years to complete at a cost of \$50 million to \$60 million.

The partners will seek financing from private sources. Van Vleck said the ranch and ClearPeak are working with Sacramento County officials to obtain the the necessary land-use and building permits.

Key to the venture will be a power purchase agreement with the Sacramento Municipal Utility District.

A SMUD spokesman confirmed that ranch officials have approached the company but said no formal proposal has been submitted yet.

At 15 megawatts, the Van Vleck Ranch project would be the largest single-site solar array in the region, dwarfing Aerojet's 6-megawatt solar project, which boasts more than 29,000 solar panels.

The ranch project would produce more than enough energy to light a small town the size of Winters in Yolo County.

The proposed solar site, which has been owned by the Van Vleck family since 1917, was once used for gold mining. More recently the land was used for cattle grazing and gravel mining.

Founded in 1856, the Van Vleck Ranch is one of the largest remaining ranches in the Sacramento region, with as many as 2,000 head of cattle on 10,000 acres of land. The ranch owns about 5,000 of those acres and leases the remaining 5,000 acres.

In recent years, the ranch has branched out into other businesses as the local cattle industry has declined. The diversified businesses include a horse club, a campground along the Cosumnes River and two paintball

operations that lease land from the ranch.

For Van Vleck, the solar power plan is part of a long-term strategy to preserve a way of life that's been a part of his family for more than a century and a half.

"For us, this is key ... to keeping us financially successful," he said.