

# County OKs first solar farm projects

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Six solar farm projects approved for construction on the west side of Tulare County will eventually produce 150 megawatts of electricity.

Last week, the Tulare County Board of Supervisors OK'd the first six of what is expected to be several more commercial solar farm projects in the county.

All six of the projects are in the Alpaugh area along a large power transmission line. All six are being done by Solar Project Solutions.

Moria Geraghty with Solar Project Solutions, said her company is developing several solar farms and has focused on Tulare County. She said they plan to begin construction of the six projects that will take up more than 2,100 acres of land early next year.

Solar companies have been moving quickly to get projects approved to take advantage of federal incentives that end this year, Geraghty told supervisors. Also, with the state mandating that a third of its power must come from renewable sources, solar projects have become very popular. A large solar farm is already under construction in Kings County and several are up for approval in both Kings and Tulare counties.

In contrast to the six projects, the 30 acre solar farm project by Southern California Edison near the Porterville Airport will only generate about 6.5 megawatts of electricity.

Geraghty said the projects not only benefit the landowners from which they will be leasing the land, but the county as well by the jobs required to construct the farms and what she called solar taxes.

Another benefit, which took a little more time Tuesday to iron out, is the company will pay the county about \$36,000 in mitigation fees annually. That is broken down to \$1,000 per megawatt on private lands — only about 20 megawatts worth — and the new negotiated fee of \$125 per megawatt for power generated on public land which is owned by the Atwell Island Irrigation District — roughly 130 megawatts.

Geraghty indicated her company had proposed paying \$100 per megawatt for private lands, but the County wanted \$200. The \$125 price was agreed to during negotiations held during the supervisors' meeting.

Kevin Couch with the Alpaugh and Atwell irrigation districts said the water districts look forward to the projects moving forward for the revenue they will generate. He said it is possible the revenue will lower costs for water users in the district.

Supervisor Chairman Steve Worthley noted that the County has taken a long and hard look at the proposals to ensure they were done properly. The six approved last week are the first in Tulare County.

““This is not a rubber stamp project,” said Worthley, adding that on some of the land the County was canceling the Williamson Act protection given the property owners. That act taxes land at a lower rate if it remains in farming.

The largest of the six projects will produce 50 megawatts of electricity on 740 acres. The other five farms will generate 20 megawatts of power each.