

DOE to provide \$70M to spur geothermal development

Emily Yehle, Environment & Energy Publishing, 6-8-11

The Department of Energy announced plans today to invest up to \$70 million to help develop geothermal technology.

The investment is aimed at supporting President Obama's goal of generating 80 percent of the country's electricity from clean energy sources by 2035. The United States has the largest geothermal capacity in the world, but in a press release, DOE said the extra funding is aimed at reducing the cost of geothermal power enough to make it competitive with conventional electricity.

Geothermal energy uses heat and steam from the Earth's core to generate electricity, making it a renewable resource.

A recent report from the Geothermal Energy Association found that federal funding and incentives helped U.S. geothermal projects and prospects under development increase 12 percent last year.

But roadblocks remain in "technical challenges" such as reservoir creation and sustainability. DOE plans to use the \$70 million over three years to support research in areas such as exploratory drilling, well completion and seismic surveying technologies for locating hidden resources, among others.

"This competitive funding opportunity will support the Department's goals of lowering the cost and financial risk associated with confirming and characterizing geothermal resources and overcoming key technical challenges to reservoir creation and sustainability in enhanced geothermal systems," DOE said in the release. "The ultimate goal is to reduce the cost of new geothermal resources and enhanced geothermal systems so they are competitive with conventional sources of electricity."

The news comes little more than a week after Energy Secretary Steven Chu announced \$27 million in new funding to reduce the non-hardware costs of solar energy projects, another clean energy source that the department hopes to make competitive in the private sector.