

# Pact paves way for first new plant at Geysers in 20 years

**Steve Hart, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 6-17-11**

The first new energy plant at The Geysers in more than 20 years will be smaller than originally planned, under a new agreement between the developer and the public agency buying the power.

Western GeoPower's 26-megawatt plant in northeastern Sonoma County could open in 2013. It will sell electricity to the Northern California Power Agency, a consortium of municipal utilities that includes Healdsburg and Ukiah.

NCPA already has four of its own power plants at The Geysers.

Three years ago, Western GeoPower announced plans for a \$165 million, 35-megawatt plant at the location. One megawatt is enough electricity to power about 1,000 households.

But the steam resource in the area appears only enough to power a 26-megawatt plant over the long term, said Ken Speer, NCPA's assistant general manager for generation services.

Last week, Western GeoPower and the agency announced a revised agreement that adjusts the plant's capacity and calls for NCPA to buy all of its production for 25 years. The agreement also sets the price and updates the schedule for completing the project.

Energy from Western GeoPower's plant will help NCPA cities meet their renewable energy goals, Speer said.

Power plants at The Geysers use super-hot, high-pressure steam from deep beneath the earth to spin their turbines and generate electricity.

The Geysers is the world's largest geothermal energy complex, with 18 power plants producing almost 900 megawatts, nearly one-fourth of California's green energy supply.

Western GeoPower already has spent about \$94 million on the Sonoma County project, according to regulatory filings by its parent company, Ram Power Corp. Ram Power, a Canadian corporation headquartered in Nevada, has other geothermal projects in the U.S., Canada and Nicaragua.

Western GeoPower owns or leases more than 600 acres at The Geysers, with four wells that will supply steam to the new plant, the company said.

Ram Power officials didn't return calls seeking comment.

Energy production at The Geysers peaked in the 1980s, with 26 power plants generating almost 2,000 megawatts. But output dropped sharply as new wells started drawing steam from old ones. By 1995, production had declined to about 1,000 megawatts and many power plants closed.

Pacific Gas & Electric Co. operated a 62-megawatt plant at the Western GeoPower site from 1979 to 1989, but there wasn't enough steam to run it at full capacity and it shut down.

PG&E sold all of its Geysers plants to Calpine Corp. in 1999.

Production at The Geysers has stabilized in recent years as wastewater from Lake County and the city of Santa Rosa was injected into the steam reservoir.