

PG&E Abandoning Wave Power

Challenges prove too much for one of California's largest utilities

Craig Miller, KQED (San Francisco television), 5-18-11

One of the nation's more progressive electric utilities is bailing out of wave energy.

Pacific Gas & Electric is giving up its pilot projects along the California coast.

"There's definitely still a future for wave energy," PG&E renewable energy spokesman Denny Boyles told me in a Sacramento interview. "Our hope is that one day it will become a more viable source," PG&E had secured development permits for three areas along the California coast but with the technology for converting wave action into electric power still in its nascent stage, the company never got as far as getting any hardware into the water. "We did several different studies," said Boyles. "There is wave energy conversion technology that's out there that's working. It's just not at a point where it's widespread enough for us."

Questions remain about what will become of public funds that PG&E acquired for wave development, a blend of state and federal money totaling about \$6 million. Boyles says that money was spent on research such as preliminary studies to determine the best locations for installations. PG&E had identified three pilot projects, one off the Humboldt coast and two others along central California.

We reported here a year ago — almost to the day — that visions of wave power off California were fraught with challenges. Then there were indications that things weren't going well last fall, when PG&E suspended its WaveConnect Pilot Project, off Humboldt County.

Boyles said he hoped that the initial interest from PG&E might help nudge the technology along. Some wave power projects along the Oregon coast, by other developers, appear to be moving ahead.