

# Supervisors approve \$700 million Calpine plan to expand The Geysers

Steve Hart, Santa Rosa Press Democrat, 11-9-11

Sonoma County supervisors Tuesday gave the go-ahead for more geothermal energy at The Geysers, approving Calpine's plan for two new power plants.

The \$700 million project is the most expensive construction project since Lake Sonoma was built 30 years ago, said Supervisor Mike McGuire, who represents the geothermal area northeast of Healdsburg. It will provide jobs, tax revenue and renewable energy, he said.

“This will be a long-term benefit for Sonoma County,” he said.

Texas-based Calpine is the biggest producer at The Geysers, the world's largest geothermal energy complex. Calpine's 15 plants there generate about 725 megawatts, enough to power more than 700,000 homes.

The Geysers produces about 24 percent of California's renewable energy, which includes geothermal, wind, solar, small hydroelectric and biomass.

The two new plants would add almost 100 megawatts to Calpine's capacity. They will be located northwest of its existing complex, on 6,200 acres of leased private and state lands within The Geysers' “known geothermal resources area.”

The project includes steam wells, pipelines, roads, electric transmission lines and towers.

The power plants will tap high-pressure steam from two miles below the earth's surface to drive turbines and generate electricity. Calpine will use reclaimed wastewater from Santa Rosa and other communities to recharge steam wells in the area.

County supervisors heard no opposition to the project Tuesday. Instead, union leaders said it would provide jobs.

“We can put a lot of people to work over the next couple of years,” said Chris Snyder of the Operating Engineers union.

Nearly 200 construction workers will be needed to build the project, Calpine said.

The project also won support from Anderson Springs, a small Lake County community near The Geysers. Anderson Springs feels frequent small earthquakes caused by nearby geothermal production.

But Calpine's new power plants are far from homes and don't pose a problem, said Jeff Gospe of Anderson Springs Community Alliance.

“We believe it's an ideal location,” he told supervisors.

A county report said the project will affect air quality, wildlife habitat, earthquake activity and noise, but found the impacts aren't significant.

The power plants still need permits from the North Sonoma County air district. Calpine is talking with utility customers about contracts to buy the power and is looking at its financing options, company officials said.

The first plant could open in 2014.