

Low geothermal resources found in Geyser area

Lacking sufficient water flow, Mississippi developer considers other projects

John Waters Jr., Weekly Calistogan, 2-25-10

When a Mississippi geothermal plant developer sees spa hotels letting water cool in pools, he sees waste.

“When you have hot water, you have energy,” said Robert Hunt, CEO of Linear Power Limited (LPL), who recently decided to capitalize on the hot water source available in the area of the Old Faithful Geyser. “We’re looking at ways we can find profitability in helping the hotels and spas save money by generating power with their hot water.”

Hunt, whose company is located in Long Beach, Miss. and is considered a leading authority in low-temperature power generation, had teamed up with the Santa Rosa-based ThermaSource, whose CEO, Lou Capuano — “a godfather of geothermal development,” Hunt said — to build a geothermal power generation plant on about 20 acres near the local tourist attraction.

“When ThermaSource did a survey of the area they discovered that there wasn’t the kind of underground aquifer to provide the sustained volume and velocity needed for an electrical power generation. There’s no way to generate anywhere near 20 to 40 megawatts of energy of some small operations, but there are other ways to profit from the energy there.”

One way, Hunt explained, was to help local businesses that already use hot water develop their system to generate their own energy.

“It won’t be a great money-maker for the business, but when they harness the energy they’re currently allowing to just evaporate into the air in cooling pools, they’ll be able to generate enough energy to offset their own energy costs.”

He believes generating about five megawatts of energy near the Old Faithful geyser might be possible.

One other option Hunt sees is the development of a fish farm in the Bennett Lane area.

According to biographical material on Hunt posted on the Southern Methodist University Web site, Hunt became a private inventor in the mid-1980s in the field of aquaculture. Hunt built a business called Redfish Hatchery, the first commercial company to successfully spawn redfish.

More recently, Hunt has focused on the development of proprietary alternative, clean-energy generating technologies focused on low temperature power generation.

Hunt is the second developer to recently consider tapping into the area’s geothermal resource.

Calistoga locals Larry Kroman and Bob Beck believe they can develop enough energy to generate power for local homes. Rather than focusing on plumbing the city to bring hot water to local homes and businesses, according to Kroman, the pair believe they can build a power plant and use existing infrastructure to deliver electricity to local users.

The pair have created a nonprofit company to make the necessary determinations to move forward on building a locally-owned public utility. No land has yet been selected for a proposed power plant.