



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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### **Garfield County Gets a Solar-Powered Ride at Fairgrounds**

Garfield County is becoming one of the brightest spots under the clean energy sun. Thursday morning, local and state officials cut a symbolic ribbon on a set of electricity inverters on the north side of the riding arena at the Garfield County Fairgrounds in Rifle. The inverters convert direct current (DC) power from the recently installed solar photovoltaic panels on the roof of the arena to alternating current (AC) power, which can be used in most residential and commercial buildings.

The installation represents the last on-site renewable energy system included in the Garfield New Energy Communities Initiative. To date, 16 installations, adding up to more than 370 kilowatts, have been installed on community and government facilities throughout the region, one of multiple components of a Department of Local Affairs grant first awarded to the region in 2008, and wrapping up this year. Local and state officials turned out for the ribbon-cutting.

Elyse Ackerman, regional manager for DOLA, explained that it was the ability of the communities in Garfield County to work together that “brought the grant here.” “DOLA typically puts its money into physical things that the county or town is going to own: a building, wiring, plumbing, asphalt, the list goes on and on,” she said. “In this project we were asked to invest in a cost savings that the county is going to experience. And that, while it’s real and tangible, it wasn’t a physical thing that we could put our name on. And that was a really difficult concept for us to wrap our heads around.” County officials, however, were able to show the benefits of the project, she said.

“They really forced DOLA and our state controllers that oversee these grants and how the money gets spent to look at the long term benefits of this particular method that this was going to have for the county,” Ackerman said.

This project is the result of collaborative efforts between Garfield Clean Energy, which is managed by CLEER (Clean Energy Economy for the Region), and Garfield County.

Ken Olson, of Sol Energy in Carbondale, which installed the photovoltaic panels, explained that the 440 modules will produce about 140,000 kilowatt-hours per year, which will be about 57 percent of historical energy use of the building, one of the largest energy users in the county. A typical U.S. home uses about 8,900 kWh/year. In its first month of operation, the system produced 62 percent of the building's electricity, Olson said.

As Garfield County commissioner Mike Samson noted, just before he took an oversized pair of scissors and snipped the ceremonial ribbon, "Basically five jobs were created when this was being built. We like that—we like job creation in Garfield County. And of course, the savings—I've heard it'll be close to \$300,000 over twenty years. I like that. And lastly, how much did the county pay for the installation of this? Nothing, because of the power purchase agreement. And that's a good deal, too."

The power purchase agreement to which Samson referred is a deal in which a third-party entity, in this case Rockwell Energy, received state and federal grants to install the system. Garfield County, meanwhile, offered the roof space, and agreed to buy power from the \$385,000 system for twenty years. The new riding arena installation represents the biggest power purchase agreement in the county to date.

"The power purchase agreement is a financing tool that can be used to bring the job creation, energy savings, and locally produced energy benefits to many more sites," said Jeff Dickinson, a green building and renewable energy expert with CLEER, who coordinated the logistics of site and contractor selection, and with Garfield County staff worked on many of the details to make the project a reality. CLEER, is the nonprofit organization that developed the original Garfield New Energy Communities proposal and manages delivery of the programs.

Rifle Mayor Keith Lambert, who sits on the Garfield Clean Energy advisory board, noted that through various governments clean energy efforts in Garfield County that more than fifty projects to make homes, businesses, and government buildings more energy efficient have been implemented in the last few years. "There's lots going on we have hopes to continue into the future," he said.

Ackerman noted that what's happening in Garfield County sets an example for other Colorado communities to follow. "This really has set a trend that other counties can now follow," she said.

### **About Power Purchase Agreements**

The project is financed through what is called a "power purchase agreement" or PPA. A PPA is a financial arrangement in which a third-party developer owns, operates, and maintains the photovoltaic (PV) system, and a host customer agrees to site the system on its roof or elsewhere on its property and purchases the system's electric output from the solar services provider for a predetermined period. This financial arrangement allows the host customer to receive stable and sometimes lower-cost electricity, while the solar

services provider or another party acquires valuable financial benefits such as tax credits and income generated from the sale of electricity to the host customer.

With this business model, the host customer buys the services produced by the PV system rather than the PV system itself. This framework is referred to as the “solar services” model, and the developers who offer PPAs are known as solar services providers. PPA arrangements enable the host customer to avoid many of the traditional barriers to adoption for organizations looking to install solar systems: high up-front capital costs; system performance risk; and complex design and permitting processes. In addition, PPA arrangements can be cash-flow positive for the host customer from the day the system is commissioned.

### **Garfield Clean Energy Solar Projects**

The 16 solar installations result in installed capacity of more than 370 kilowatts, plus 26 MBTU from the Carbondale solar hot water project. Additional funds developed: \$35,000 in grants (Carbondale Senior Housing) plus an estimated \$1,023,028 in REC and rebate payments from Xcel Energy.

The projects include:

- Town of Parachute: Installations of 10 kilowatts each at the Town Hall and the water treatment plant. Unique installation of three solar flowers, 3.6 kilowatts total, at the Parachute I-70 Rest Area. Grand opening at rest area: Aug. 27, 2010.
- City of Rifle: Installations of 10 kilowatts each at the new police department and courts building, 201 E. 18th, the parks maintenance facility at Deerfield Park, and the city operations and maintenance facility, 1221 E. Centennial Parkway. Grand opening held May 10, 2010 at Deerfield Park.
- Town of Silt: Installations of 10 kilowatts each at Town Hall, senior housing and the wastewater treatment plant. Grand opening: Thursday, Sept. 2, 2010.
- Town of New Castle: Installation of two arrays totaling 70 kilowatts on two buildings at the new Public Works Facility, 801 W. Main St. Project financed through a power purchase agreement, DOLA grant allocation used to pre-purchase electricity under the PPA. Grand opening held Jan. 16, 2011.
- City of Glenwood Springs: Installation of a 20.52-kilowatt electric system on the Community Center, 100 Wulfsohn Drive. Grand opening, September 2010.
- Town of Carbondale:
  - Project 1: installation of 29.5-kilowatt of solar electric and 7 panels of solar hot water at Carbondale Senior Housing, 1250 Hendrick Dr. Partnered with CORE grant

(\$25,000) and wrote an Aspen Skiing Co. Environment Foundation (\$10,000). Grand opening held July 9, 2010.

Project 2: installation of 1.5-kilowatt bi-facial solar electric entry canopy at Third Street Center. Project is complete. Grand opening held June 19, 2010.

- Garfield Public Library District:

Project 1: installation of 53-kilowatt solar electric array on the new Rifle Branch Library. Grand opening held Dec. 9, 2010.

Project 2: installation of 10-kilowatt array at the remodeled Parachute Branch Library. Grand opening Sept. 11 2010.

- Garfield County Fairgrounds: Installation of about 103-kilowatt solar electric system on the riding arena in Rifle, using a power purchase agreement. Grand opening: April 21, 2011.

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Clean Energy Economy for the Region (CLEER) is a Carbondale-based non-profit that works to accelerate the transition to a clean energy economy, increase energy independence and reduce our contribution to climate change. CLEER seeks and supports collaborative opportunities for research, education, advocacy and implementation of resource efficiency projects.