

Our View: Energy summit offers tangible practices, advice

By IMPERIAL VALLEY PRESS STAFF | Posted: Friday, March 14, 2014 12:10 am

The agenda for this year's Imperial Valley Renewable Energy Summit is packed with substance, with topics, speakers and ideas to be debated that may mean much more than in previous summits.

Much of that has to do with the maturity of the industry as a whole. In the immediate past this was very much a speculative game of trying to see what would work and what would take hold locally, of talking up the future rather than the present.

But the future is now, the industry is up and running and the results, for good or bad, are something we can talk about in a real way.

The summit kicked off Wednesday with a bus tour of renewable energy projects in Imperial County, starting at the Quechan Casino Resort in Winterhaven before heading to solar projects in the county's Southend and then north to the Salton Sea.

Geothermal, solar and wind projects already generate about 500 megawatts of renewable energy, most of it exported to outside interests.

Where once this part of the Colorado Desert was seen as a place to transport and deposit metropolitan waste, today it is viewed as a sort of Holy Grail, the source that will enable companies and cities to meet the state's renewable energy mandate that is rapidly approaching its deadline.

California's Renewables Portfolio Standard, which has its origins in 2002's Senate Bill 1078, demands that investor-owned utilities, electric service and governmental entities, collectively called community choice aggregates, to have 33 percent of power procurement from renewable energy sources by 2020. As a result, renewable-energy applications are coming to the county of Imperial in numbers that have been described as staggering.

Already, the nearly 2 million panels at one solar farm alone near El Centro can power 44,000 California homes, according to company statistics. Thousands of acres of Imperial County land already are producing alternative energy, but that is a pittance of the area's

potential, developers believe.

Imperial County was described as offering “enormous possibilities” by one 2014 summit participant and “promising” by another. These possibilities have not only attracted developers, but have resulted in an increase in the numbers of people training as electricians. Yet another group, consisting of some curious about where their products grow, are also along for the ride at the summits.

Transforming farmland or pristine desert into power-generators has not come easily. Native Americans and farmers alike have fought development of what each group sees as sacred ground at the altar of renewable energy. Sensitivity to both groups’ interests has become part of the conversation, as it should.

At the summit, which is sponsored by the Imperial Valley Economic Development Corp., new ground continues to be broken.

Theory has given way to practice, and frankly, the development of best practices and advice as we move forward in the renewable energy industry.

THE ISSUE:

Renewable energy summit.

WE SAY:

The agenda offers more meaning this year.

WHAT DO YOU SAY?

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