

Snowline schools use solar to unlock revenue from banked land



Established in 1982, the Snowline Joint Unified School District encompasses several communities in Southern California, including Wrightwood, Phelan, Pinon Hills, and portions of Victorville. Over the past three decades, the District has grown to a current student population of over 8,500 students in grades K-12.

Project Profile: Snowline Joint Unified School District

Industry: K-12 Education

Location: Phelan, California

Company: Snowline Joint Unified School District

System Type: Ground and Canopy-Mounted Solar Panels

System Size: 1.9 MW over 7 operational Projects

11.7 MW over 3 projects planned

Project Budget: \$5.1 million for portions owned by the District

Snowline is proud of its commitment to providing an excellent education to their students. Three of the District's elementary schools and the two middle schools have been recognized by the state as California Distinguished Schools.

Challenge

Like most public school districts, Snowline faces tight budgets, and is always looking for innovative ways to meet these challenges. In 2009, when California was aggressively trimming education funding, officials at the District developed plans to help offset the cuts by utilizing some of its undeveloped land.

"We had land banked land adjacent to two of our facilities that I thought would be a good place to fill with solar panels" explained Mike Schene, Director of Maintenance & Operations for SJUSD. "Initially I wanted to feed power to the school sites and the remainder to the grid to generate revenue for the District."

SJUSD or Snowline, together with the San Bernardino County Office of Education and other Districts interested in solar in San Bernardino County, put together an RFP for solar services to get the initiative moving forward. After interviews with several solar vendors, Snowline chose SunEdison to put their plan into action.

Solution

Working in close collaboration, SunEdison and Snowline evaluated 12 possible sites for solar. Seven sites were found suitable for the initial phase of the project, and deployment began.

Two of the larger sites utilized fixed ground mounted solar panel installations with single axis trackers. For the remaining sites, SunEdison worked with a local solar contractor to set up carport panels adjacent to five school campuses. The first phase of the project was completed in 2011.

"I have been involved in the construction industry for almost 40 years, and it was one of the smoothest projects I've seen," says Schene.

Together, the solar sites generate 1.98 megawatts of power for the District. Approximately half of the power is generated from solar systems that the District purchased and owns, and this revenue goes directly to Snowline's general fund. The remaining sites were developed through a Power Purchase Agreement (PPA), and were funded by SunEdison at no cost to the District. The PPA is a standard PPA, whereby SunEdison owns and operates the arrays and

sells Snowline Joint Unified Schools the power at a reduced price, lower than Southern California Edison's price, with an annual escalation clause of four percent. Southern California Edison has historically increased prices by five percent or more annually. However, in the past year, its increases were approximately 16 percent.

Benefits

The SunEdison systems have performed beyond expectations, and produced more than 3.3 million kilowatt hours of energy in 2012. With SunEdison's advanced monitoring tools, the District can measure power production in real time and gain insight into its power consumption.

"We use the InvestorConnect web portal to monitor the systems that the District owns and they have been providing 100 to 110 percent of the expected output," says Schene. "The SunEdison solutions are consistently meeting or beating the energy output guarantee specified by our agreement. Payback for the project had been projected at eight years, and we are hoping to beat that."

With the first phase of its deployment completed, the District has now decided to lease SunEdison 92 acres of its undeveloped land that was land banked for future school sites. This will enable the company to develop its own solar facility and sell the energy to Southern California Edison. The district will receive 4 percent of the net for energy produced at these sites. Officials estimate that the follow-up lease agreement could generate \$100,000 to \$150,000 per year for the District.

To further extend the benefits of its solar installations, Snowline is exploring possible ways to include solar technology as part of its learning curriculum.

"We envisioned incorporating solar and alternative energies as part of our science and educational program when we began these projects and still look forward to making this happen," says Schene. "Who knows, it could spark the imagination of a student and they could be the one to come up with the next 'big thing' in energy production."

SunEdison is a leading provider of solar energy services. Serving business, public sector including schools and universities, utility, and residential customers, SunEdison is dedicated to transforming lives by delivering economical, clean, renewable energy to communities around the globe.

For more information

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