

# Company plans \$1 billion San Juan County power plant

Plant to burn natural gas, generate solar power

*By Dan Schwartz The Daily Times*

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A conceptual drawing of a solar farm that is part of Western Energy Partners' proposed 1 billion natural gas power plant planned for San Juan County. (Courtesy Patrick Dorinson)

FARMINGTON — A Colorado-based company plans to build a 750 megawatt natural gas and photovoltaic power plant in San Juan County that will cost close to \$1 billion, according to a company spokesman.

Officials with Western Energy Partners, LLC, the Colorado company, expect to finish building the plant in the middle of 2019 and employ 30 full-time employees once it is operational, according to a press release. They anticipate creating approximately 800 temporary jobs while building the plant, according to the release.

Natural gas will provide 680 megawatts of the electricity produced by the plant, and solar panels will generate the other 70 megawatts, according to the press release.



From left, San Juan County Commission Chairman Keith Johns, County Executive Officer Kim Carpenter and Curt Hildebrand, president of Western Energy Partners, on Monday look over the area off County Road 6900 in Waterflow where a proposed 1 billion natural gas power plant is planned. (Alexa Rogals — The Daily Times)

Western Energy Partners President Curt Hildebrand is scheduled to present more details about the plant at the county commission meeting scheduled for 4 p.m. today at 100 South Oliver Drive in Aztec.

The possibility of the power plant has been on County Executive Officer Kim Carpenter's mind every day for a year, he said. "The best thing that we could do is be able to produce what we process here, locally," he said.

The county has ample natural gas to harvest, plenty of land for plant construction and existing transmission lines to carry the electricity, he said. It already has the resources required by Western Energy Partners, he said.

Ray Hagerman, Four Corners Economic Development CEO, said the plant will fill two regional holes.

One was opened when Arizona Public Service shut down three stacks at its coal-fired plant and Public Service Company of New Mexico shut down two stacks at another coal-fired power plant that provides jobs to the area. The other was created when BHP sold its coal mine to the Navajo Nation, taking that land off the county's tax roll.

The new plant will replace much of the generating capacity lost from shutting down stacks at the coal-fired power plants, and the new plant will generate property taxes for the county replacing some of what was lost when the mine was transferred to Navajo Nation ownership, Hagerman said.

The downside is that natural gas plants require few staff, he said. But "overall it's a really good thing," he said.

Carpenter said the plant will create momentum to use natural gas, which can be used to create more than electricity. It can be burned in trucks and cars, which is done more elsewhere in the country, he said. So far, the county doesn't have enough propane or natural gas fueling pumps, he said.

"We're just beginning to touch on what natural gas will be doing for us in the future," he said.

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