

Facebook invests in renewables with Texas solar project

11 June 2019, by Russell Contreras



This July 16, 2013, file photo, shows a sign at Facebook headquarters in Menlo Park, Calif. The Boston-based renewable energy developer Longroad Energy announced in May 2019 that Facebook is building a massive new solar farm in West Texas, a project believed to be one of the largest in the nation and the social media giant's first direct investment in renewable energy. (AP Photo/Ben Margot, File)

Facebook is building a massive solar farm in West Texas that's believed to be one of the largest solar projects in the nation and the social media giant's first direct investment in renewable energy.

Boston-based renewable energy developer Longroad Energy recently announced it was partnering with Facebook on the \$416 million project, just as Facebook is finishing construction of a data center near Albuquerque.

The Prospero Solar project just north of Odessa, Texas, will have a capacity of 379 megawatts, which is enough to power around 72,000 homes based on the national average, the Solar Energy Industries Association said.

The project goes beyond Facebook's goal to use

renewable energy to power its data centers, where the social media giant stores photos, videos and other information that people post on the platform.

Prospero Solar is expected to be completed next year and will take up around 7 square miles (18 square kilometers)—more than five times the size of Central Park in New York City.

Menlo Park, California-based Facebook will be the sole tax equity investor, Longroad said.

Ben Inskeep, a research analyst for EQ Research, a North Carolina-based renewable energy consulting firm, said it makes sense for Facebook to invest in solar power because renewable energy is becoming more affordable and its data centers have huge operating costs.



In this April 30, 2019, file photo, Facebook stickers are laid out on a table at F8, Facebook's developer conference in San Jose, Calif. The Boston-based renewable energy developer Longroad Energy announced in May that Facebook is building a massive new solar farm in West Texas, a project believed to be one of the largest in the nation and the social media giant's first direct investment in renewable energy. (AP Photo/Tony Avelar, File)

"West Texas has some of the best solar resources in the nation," Inskeep said. "So it's not about saying you support renewable energy. It makes good business sense."

Shell Energy North America and Facebook will share the power generated by the solar farm.

"Facebook is excited to be one of the first companies to use a direct investment to meet our renewable energy goals," company energy strategy manager Peter Freed said in a statement.

CEO Mark Zuckerberg announced in April that Facebook was building six new solar projects to support its data centers. They house tens of thousands of computer servers, which are linked to the outside world through fiber-optic cables.

"Our data centers are already some of the most energy efficient in the world, and last year we set a goal for all our data centers and offices to use 100% renewable energy by 2020," Zuckerberg wrote on his personal Facebook page. "These new solar projects will help us reach that goal."

It comes as Facebook battles New Mexico regulators over a new transmission line to its data center in the small town of Los Lunas.

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State regulators last month declined to reconsider their decision for the largest utility to bill Facebook \$39 million for the transmission line. They said ratepayers could not be charged for the project because the line wouldn't benefit retail customers.

The Public Service Co. of New Mexico said it's disappointed by the decision and is reviewing options for how to proceed.

The New Mexico data center is one of seven such sites for Facebook, and includes six buildings for data storage. It is situated on a patch of desert at the edge of Los Lunas, which lies just beyond the edge of New Mexico's largest metropolitan area and along the Rio Grande.

Each of the data center's buildings is roughly the size of four football fields and has several "data halls," or darkened, vast rooms where Facebook plans to store dozens of rows of towering servers. Two of those halls are now in operation, while construction that began more than two years ago will continue until 2023, the company said.



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In this April 30, 2019, file photo, Facebook CEO Mark Zuckerberg makes the keynote speech at F8, Facebook's developer conference in San Jose, Calif. The Boston-

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