

Developing geothermal energy boosts the valley

The Coachella Valley is abundant in wind and sun and with the expansion of geothermal energy near the Salton Sea, the valley has an immense opportunity to grow its economy.

It is imperative that we develop our local resources and ensure our leadership in the worldwide production of renewable energy. Already, companies are expanding the geothermal business in the valley.

One step that helps ensure that growth is the Salton Sea restoration plan. The plan calls for more geothermal development as part of transforming the Sea from a dying lake to a viable economic and recreational resource, which is a smart move.

State law also requires greenhouse gases to be cut by 20 percent. Similar efforts to focus on renewable energy are being considered at the federal level. Just this week, two Nevada-based utility subsidiaries opened up a bidding process for companies that can deliver clean, renewable energy to their grids, yet another reason to do more here to meet the growing need.

Geothermal energy is homegrown, and the areas near the Salton Sea are ripe for expansion of its production. It reduces our dependence on foreign oil. According to the U.S. Department of Energy, geothermal energy can also cut the trade deficit by half. We also can manufacture and sell the equipment worldwide, creating another pay day for our economy.

In addition, being green is fashionable.

We've got everything going for us in this arena, so we should focus heavily on capitalizing on our abundant resources. Doing so could mean putting this region in the driver's seat for the production of clean, renewable energy for the entire country, if not the world.

The Coachella Valley could be one of the largest producers of geothermal energy. Enough electricity can be produced to provide for the entire valley, and the number of plants could nearly double, creating jobs in the process.

As reported on page A-1 of Sunday's *The Desert Sun*, projects currently underway include three smaller plants by CalEnergy Corp., which already operates 10 plants along the Salton Sea. Iceland America Energy is conducting testing that could lead to a 40-megawatt plant just west of Salton City. Ormat Technologies, operator of 10 plants in Imperial County, is expected to open a new plant by the end of 2009.

If all of this happens, this region will become the greatest producer of geothermal energy, according to CalEnergy officials. The majority of it will come from the Salton Sea area. This is great news for valley residents.

The challenge is to get the power to the grid. A lot of effort is being focused on making this happen. If it is successful, we are looking at sustainable energy and a better quality of life for residents of the Coachella Valley and beyond.

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JAY CALDERON / THE DESERT SUN

This is the world's largest diameter geothermal pipe, operated by CalEnergy near the Salton Sea's southern tip.