

Terri Gent 2/4/2008

Re: Envisioning 2020

Companies who want to build large-scale solar power production plants are looking for places to do so in the Southwest. They are trying to position themselves to respond to the growing demand for alternative energy production. Cochise County can compete in the race to attract a solar power plant. The solar power companies, some very young, are run by incredibly talented people. Their investors are motivated both by business opportunities and altruistic motives. They would be good neighbors. If an opportunity presents itself, would the county be able to respond? How can we guard against losing opportunities to another region better positioned to compete for this kind of green business?

If it would be appropriate to do so, I would like to share these observations as part of the Envisioning 2020 Project. Specifically, I would like to suggest that we need to allow for the development of large scale solar power production and possibly some wind power in Cochise County.

There is already room at the SWPG Bowie power plant site for solar power production. And as I understand it, all the necessary regulatory approvals are in place and good for another three years or so. But the site may prove to be too small for a full-scale plant, or companies may find a different location in the county better for any number of reasons. I know very little about wind power. But I have heard that the wind power advocates are reconsidering earlier assumptions about the viability of that technology in parts of Arizona, including ours.

I was encouraged to learn last week that the Southeast Arizona Economic Development Group (in Benson) is kicking around the idea of putting on a symposium on solar power somewhere in the county. They want the full gamut of technology (from small panels to large-scale production) to be better understood. There is definitely a grass roots effort to promote solar power afoot in Cochise County.

The question we need to be thinking about is whether the county would welcome large-scale power production by alternative means. I hope to put this forward during the Envisioning 2020 discussion. I welcome your advice on the most appropriate way to do so.

Thank you for getting all the folks of Cochise County involved in planning.