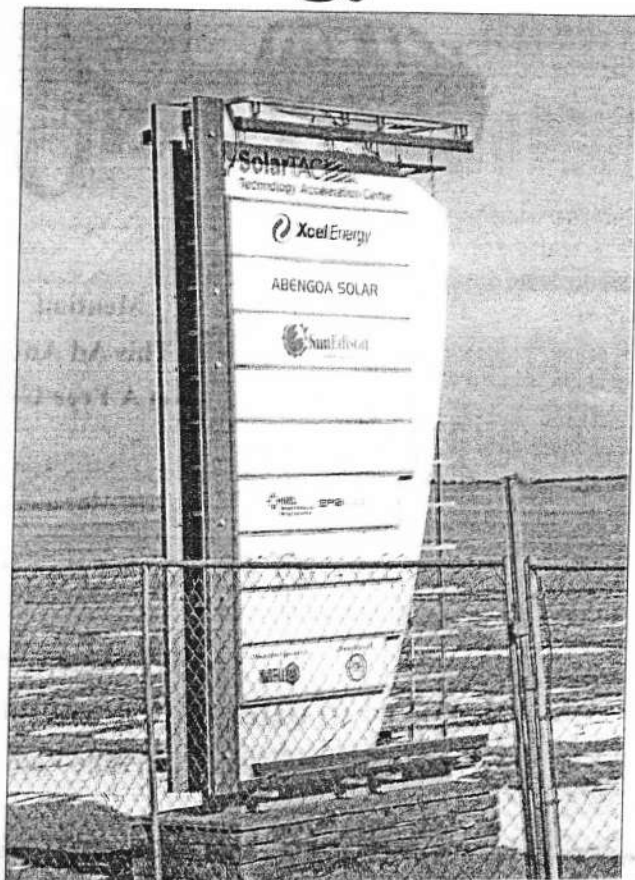


Alt energy outfit making solar waves

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WATKINS — A one-of-a-kind alternative energy research facility on the I-70 Corridor might be operational later this year.

"We hope by summer to have a lot of the paving done and the solar decathlon house in place," said SolarTAC Executive Director Dustin Smith during the Feb. 11 Regional Economic Advancement Partnership Meeting at Front Range Airport. "Some of the research projects could be coming out in April. This should be a pretty exciting place by mid-summer."

The 74-acre site at Hudson Road and 26th Avenue northwest of Watkins will host several public and private renewable energy entities to research new ideas and test products.

"This is as unique as it gets. There's really nothing else like it in the world," Smith said. "We're a private, member-based organization with sponsorship designed to bridge between the laboratory and pilot projects. There is no mechanism currently, especially in the U.S., to test at a utility scale, which we will offer."

SolarTAC partnerships include federal government and private industry. Power utility Xcel Energy and solar developers Abengoa Solar and SunEdison are

founding members in SolarTAC, which is managed by the Midwest Research Institute. In addition, the National Research Energy Laboratory and Electric Power Research Institute have bought sponsoring memberships to join SolarTAC.

"Our members will use SolarTAC differently. Abengoa will work on their proprietary research and has five acres. SunEdison is more of an integrator focusing on the photovoltaic side; they will bring companies together to develop systems on about 10 acres. Xcel Energy is an active member and is working on creating projects," Smith said. "There are three pieces to SolarTAC — a common area with parking, hosting area and the decathlon house; the thermal piece where the sun's heat will be collected and generate power; and the electrical, which will focus on the photovoltaic side."

The decathlon house is a project home selected by the U.S. Department of Energy.

NREL is expected to utilize the site for research concerning storage of the sun's heat.

Smith said the problem with both wind and solar power is that energy produced cannot be stored and that the startup of plants is time consuming.

"With a coal-fired plant, a few hours

and it is up and running and producing power. It's not the same way with solar or wind right now, and it's that nondispatchable issue that needs to be addressed," Smith said. "That's part of NREL's focus."

SolarTAC broke ground on the site last October and is installing the rest of the infrastructure.

"We're looking at about \$6 million of basic infrastructure and have \$1 million into the grading and collection and treatment of water runoff before it goes back into Coyote Creek," Smith said.

In addition, a meteorological station will be housed at the site.

Smith indicated there is significant international interest in SolarTAC.

"I just hosted a few Japanese and their reaction to the site was one of awe," Smith said. "They held out their arms and turned around like they have never seen anything like it. That was because they have never been around such a wide open place like this before. Everybody tells me what's the big deal about this flat piece of open land and I tell them that it's a solar guy's dream — wide open, no trees and nothing but the sky above."

While the site's address is technically Aurora, REAP Executive Director Jack Keever said SolarTAC is a welcome member to the I-70 Corridor.