

Agreement signed at Fort Irwin to create solar power

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Photo credit Senior Airman Larry E. Reid Jr., USAF

The Army signed a memorandum of agreement Oct. 15, for an enhanced-use lease to begin development of a 500-megawatt solar power facility at Fort Irwin, Calif. The facility will be similar to this photovoltaic solar power facility at Nellis Air Force Base, Nev.

WASHINGTON (Army News Service, Oct. 16, 2009) -- The Army signed a memorandum of agreement Oct. 15, for an enhanced-use lease to begin development of a 500-megawatt solar power plant at Fort Irwin, Calif.

The agreement -- with Clark Energy Group of Arlington, Va., and Acciona Solar Power of Henderson, Nev. -- will allow the commercial developers to use land at Fort Irwin to construct a solar power plant there between 2013 and 2022. The facility will provide power to both the civilian power grid in California, and to Fort Irwin, home of the Army's National Training Center.

The EUL is an agreement where the Army will provide to the developers, for as many as 50 years, up to 14,000 acres of land. In return, the Army receives rent for the land through cash or in-kind services.

Construction of the project provides "energy security" for the Army, said Brig. Gen. Robert B. Abrams, commander of the National Training Center. He explained that energy security means that even in the event of a collapse of the civilian power grid, power stays on at Fort Irwin -- allowing the Army to continue its mission there.

"It is mission-essential our mission here must continue, regardless of energy conditions in California or southern California," Abrams said. "So in terms of enhancing energy security for Fort Irwin ... this is a key capability for us. In times of uncertainty, sometimes in the future when there may be some uncertainty with power availability, this is absolute insurance we will be able to continue our mission to prepare and train forces for deployment."

Abrams said that even on the "worst day in August," Fort Irwin needs about 28 MW of power. With a 500-MW solar facility on the installation, the remainder of that power generation can be sold to the civilian power grid, Abrams said.

The civilian developers of the property will construct a facility with both concentrated solar thermal and photovoltaic technology. Clark-Acciona will be responsible for developing the project and for footing the bill for its construction -- estimated now at about \$1.5 billion. Neither the government, nor the Army, will pay for development of the project, but will instead collect rent in-kind for use of the land it leases to the developer.

The 500-MW facility will be built in phases, with a project end date expected around

2022. But Phase 1A of the project, with a completion of around 2014, is expected to provide enough power to sustain Fort Irwin.

It could be two years before construction of the project can begin at the Fort Irwin site. Until then, developers must go through a "comprehensive environmental evaluation of the project," said Francis J. Coen, managing director, Clark Energy Group.

Project developers at Fort Irwin believe that, after developing the 500-MW facility as required, per the deal with the Army, future development could lead to a 1,000-MW facility.