

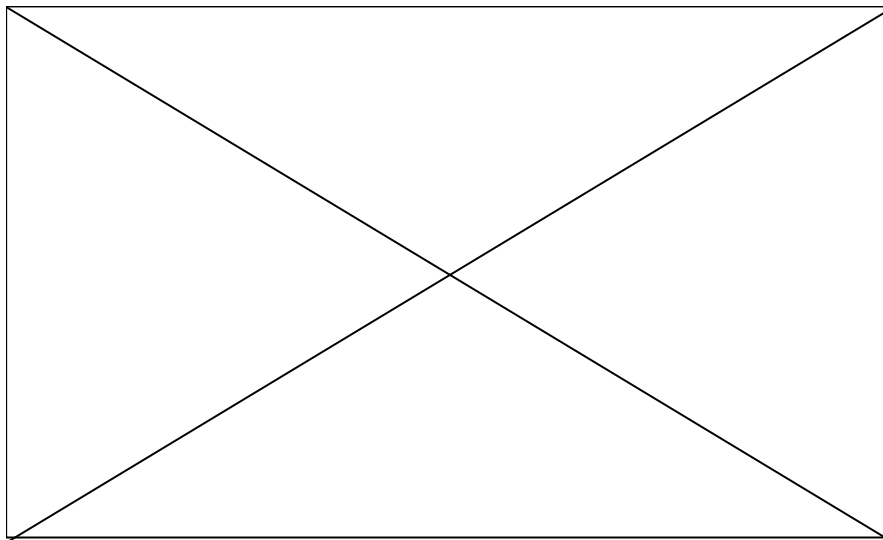
ONE BILLION DOLLAR SOLAR PROJECT ENDORES IN CALIFORNIA¹

Jake Richardson©

A 370 megawatt solar thermal facility has been recommended for approval by the California Energy Commission. The facility will be called the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System, and located in San Bernadino County. Reportedly, it will generate enough electricity to power 140,000 homes.

The type of solar plant that is likely to be built there is not just a large collection of solar panels. Instead it will use several 459 foot high power towers which will have sunlight reflected to them from fields of mirrors, called heliostats. Each mirror is 7 feet by 10.5 feet. The total number of mirrors used could be over 300,000. Inside the power towers are steam boilers which make steam from the reflected light, and steam then turns internal turbines which generate electricity. Several thousand acres of land could be used for the many mirrors.

Solar Power Tower Concept



One issue that appears not to have been completely dealt with is the environmental impact of the construction on the desert lands where it is to be built. Basin and Range Watch reported about this problem, “At least 12 rare plants have been found on the project site, some with significant portions of their range facing destruction from the solar facility.”

A Mojave Desert writer’s website delves into this situation even more, “There is a broad misconception among the public (and to some extent among scientists and land managers) that we have completed our floristic inventory of the California desert, and that the remaining hotbeds for botanical discovery are limited to places like Indonesia and the Brazilian Amazon. Yet the California desert is, in fact, one of the remaining floristic frontiers in the United States.”

¹ Care2, Healthy and Green Living Newsletter, August 06, 2010

Endangered desert tortoises also live on the land slated for the construction site, and they have to be relocated, without being harmed, if that is possible.

Construction on the project could begin this fall, and be completed by 2010. Over 400 workers would be employed during the construction phase. Once operational, about 90 workers will be active in maintaining the energy production and equipment.