



**For More Information, Contact:
Lynn Komer—505-660-7682 cell
Dale Lyons—505-955-4204 work; 505-231-6348 cell**

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Solar Plant Begins Generating Power to Reduce Utility Costs and Carbon Footprint for the Buckman Regional Water Treatment Plant

SANTA FE—Solar generated power is supplying most of the electricity needed to operate the Buckman Regional Water Treatment Plant (BRWTP), saving \$250,000 in annual energy costs. The solar electricity provides much of the BRWTP peak needs and accounts for one-third of the yearly electricity needed to pump raw water from the Rio Grande and finished treated water to City and County storage tanks.

“It takes a lot of electricity to move a lot of water a long way uphill. It makes perfect sense to use free sunlight to generate power and save our customers money,” said Virginia Vigil, BDD board chair and chair of Santa Fe County Board of Commissioners. “Instead of being simply a consumer of energy, we are now producing energy,” she said.

The 1-megawatt solar photovoltaic (PV) plant was designed, built, owned and operated by American Capital Energy, Inc. (ACE), a national private sector solar developer, which has a Santa Fe office. The BDD Project buys the generated solar energy at a 20-year fixed-price of half a cent per kWh. The BDD Project also saves by not having to purchase an equal amount of PNM power, saving on rates that currently range from 3.3 cents per kWh nights and weekends to 18 cents a kWh during summer days.

The BDD had no upfront costs for the system, which was capitalized by American Capital Energy, Inc., but the BDD holds the 8-acre Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lease next to the BRWTP on which the solar facility was constructed. ACE is responsible for performance, operation and maintenance risk of the solar facility for the 20-year term of the Solar Energy Agreement. The solar plant generates about 2,300 megawatts hours of electricity each year.

According to the solar project manager and water planner for the City of Santa Fe, Dale Lyons, “The Solar Energy Agreement reduces annual BDD project operating costs, provides a long-term fixed energy price at an uncertain time in energy markets and reduces the BDD Project’s dependence on conventional, fossil fuel-intensive energy sources.

“The BDD Board is moving in the right direction as environmental stewards. Buying green power for the benefit of customers and the environment is a visible example for others to follow,” said Rebecca Wurzbarger, BDD Board vice-chair and Santa Fe City Council Mayor Pro Tem.

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