

# Solar project fate unclear after pact with utility

JOHN MILLER - Associated Press - Associated Press

What was to have been Idaho's first utility-scale solar panel farm has missed a key deadline to deliver electricity to Idaho Power Co., deepening uncertainty over the project's fate and dealing another blow to Idaho's struggling alternative energy industry.

The Grandview PV Solar One project in Elmore County was supposed to deliver up to 20 megawatts of electricity to Idaho Power Co. by Jan. 12, but the date came and passed.

As of last September, the project appeared to be moving forward, what would have been a rare bright spot in Idaho's alternative landscape where wind and dairy biogas projects were being canceled. Its owner, New York-based Mark Scher, had said he would begin installing about \$30 million worth of solar panels within just a few weeks in a 180-acre field 60 miles east of Boise leased from the J.R. Simplot Co.

This week, however, Scher declined to elaborate on the status of Grandview.

"I really can't comment," he said Wednesday in a brief interview.

For its part, Idaho Power, which is a unit of IdaCorp Inc., said it's reached a confidential settlement agreement with Corona Capital Partners, Scher's company. The utility has submitted the agreement to regulators at the Idaho Public Utilities Commission for their approval. The PUC will review the deal to make sure it's in the best interest for rate payers, said PUC spokesman Gene Fadness.

"We have no further comment about the agreement or the Grand View Solar project," said Brad Bowlin, an Idaho Power spokesman, in a statement.

Separately, Scher faces a federal lawsuit, filed by a construction company last year that claims it was stiffed on work it had completed to design and build the solar plant in southwestern Idaho.

The next date in that case in U.S. District Court in Boise is planned for Feb. 26.

Numerous other Idaho alternative energy projects have been scuttled in recent months, with Exergy Development Group LLC in Boise mothballing some \$323 million worth of wind projects as well as separate digesters that were to have been located at southern Idaho dairies.

Idaho only recently completed a rewrite of rules governing alternative energy projects in the state that developers like Exergy have blamed for turbulence in their industry, in particular with finding financing.

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What's more, Idaho has no renewable portfolio standard like Washington and Oregon that sets long-term mandates for regulated utilities to buy renewable power like the kind generated by wind or solar projects. Without such a standard, environmental groups say individual projects like Grandview will struggle to succeed because utilities like Idaho Power have little incentive to work with them through challenges.

"There's all sort of hurdles and disagreements," said Idaho Conservation League's Ben Otto, who advocates for more renewable energy sources. "When you get down to the nuts and bolts, it doesn't actually work" without a renewable portfolio standard.

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