Western Slope Hoping for Biofuels Jobs

GRAND JUNCTION, Colo. (AP) — A biofuels company moving to Colorado is heating up competition for jobs among local communities across the state hoping to reap some of the benefits.

Cool Planet Energy Systems Inc. has developed a technique to convert biomass into high-octane gasoline, jet fuel and diesel fuel by converting corncobs and trees killed by pine and spruce beetles, and there are plenty of those commodities in Colorado.

The company said it's good for its bottom line and good for the environment.

"By selecting Colorado as the location for our global headquarters and with plans to locate our first manufacturing facility here, we're moving closer to commercializing our revolutionary carbon negative fuel technology," said Howard Janzen, chief executive officer.

The company, which Gov. John Hickenlooper's economic development office helped lure to the state, plans to move its corporate headquarters from Camarillo, Calif., to Greenwood Village, a Denver suburb.

By the end of next year, however, Cool Planet plans to open several conversion plants around the state, several of which are likely to be located on the Western Slope.

Mike Rocke, the company's vice president for business development, said it plans to hire about 400 people over the next three years.

Cool Planet plans to build modular refineries, which can be moved to where the fuel is located, including forests devastated with dead pine-beetle trees, he said. The facilities would take about six weeks to move and would stay in place as long as there's enough biomass within a 30- to 50-mile radius.

The converted fuel will be taken to Denver refineries, where it is expected to be mixed with normal gasoline, much like ethanol is used today.

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