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Department of Energy Announces Solar Energy Innovation Network Awardees

This week, the U.S. Department of Energy announced that an energy solutions team, including Kit Carson Electric Cooperative (KCEC), is one of eight project teams chosen nationwide to participate in the Solar Energy Innovation Network (SEIN). The SEIN supports multi-stakeholder teams pursuing new applications of solar energy and other distributed energy resources in unique locations and contexts. KCEC is on a team called SPECs: Solar-Plus for Electric Co-ops, led by Santa Fe, NM, based Cliburn and Associates. Other SPECs team members include Cobb Electric Membership Corp. from Georgia, United Power from Colorado, the North Carolina Clean Energy Technology Center, and others.

The SPECs project will focus on procuring and operating battery storage to optimize local solar and distributed energy resource (DER) portfolios. Led by local energy strategist Jill Cliburn and building on her previous work with the U.S. DOE-funded Community Solar Value Project, the members of the team will demonstrate and validate the project solutions in real-world contexts, making them ready to scale and replicate among rural electric cooperatives nationwide.

"We are delighted to be working with Kit Carson on this project," said Jill Cliburn, founder of Cliburn and Associates. "This relatively small co-op has led the nation in demonstrating how to achieve greater use of renewable energy without sacrificing reliability and strong customer service."

KCEC partnered with its wholesale power provider Guzman Energy and Renewable Taos in the first round of the SEIN on a project called Resilient Renewable Energy Roadmap for Rural Electric Cooperatives. The team worked with NREL to develop a tool that could optimize the deployment of solar and storage across an entire distribution system, identifying opportunities for infrastructure and operational cost savings and improved resilience. The team completed its work in summer 2019 and KCEC has successfully used the tool in the ongoing build-out of 38 MW of solar and 18 MWh of battery storage to meet its 2022 goal of being powered 100% by solar power in the daytime.

KCEC's participation in both SEIN rounds is an example of the kind of leadership rural electric cooperatives can demonstrate with a creative and flexible power supply partner. Guzman Energy is a wholesale power supplier based in Denver, CO that helps communities across the country access the benefits of an energy transition through customized energy solutions. Guzman has supported and helped KCEC implement its solar goals, resulting in cleaner, local energy with broad economic development and community benefits.

"Rural cooperatives have lots of opportunities to increase solar adoption for the benefit of their members," said Luis Reyes, CEO of KCEC. "We are excited to continue our participation in the SEIN and work with a new set of partners to develop tools that will help us and co-ops across the country integrate more solar and storage in a cost-effective, resilient way."

The SPECs project team will hold a virtual kick-off meeting next month to lay out a plan for the coming year. Each of the eight teams will pursue focused research, as well as broad networking with the other teams, to develop innovations to speed energy adoption and local energy resilience. As the SPECs team is working in a the fast-changing world of battery storage and distributed energy resource integration, Cliburn says team members adopted a motto: to build today while anticipating tomorrow's surprises.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, and the Rocky Mountain Institute will provide the teams with analytical, modeling, and facilitation support to develop their solutions. Teams will also receive direct funding of up to \$125,000. This round of the SEIN will end in spring 2021, and the teams will present their findings to other entities facing similar challenges.

The National Renewable Energy Laboratory is leading the SEIN with funding from the U.S. Department of Energy's Solar Energy Technologies Office, part of the Office of Energy Efficiency and Renewable Energy. For more information about the SEIN, visit <https://www.nrel.gov/solar/solar-energy-innovation-network.html>

About Kit Carson Electric Cooperative

Formed in 1944, Kit Carson is a member owned electric distribution cooperative in northern New Mexico and is the second largest cooperative in the state. Kit Carson is one of 16 electric cooperatives that serve rural New Mexico communities, serving nearly 30,000 members in Taos, Colfax and Rio Arriba counties. To learn more about Kit Carson, visit www.kitcarson.com.

About Cliburn and Associates, LLC

For more than 25 years, Cliburn and Associates has provided expertise in developing and applying innovative solutions for local utilities and the communities they serve. She has worked on the cutting edge of solar and wind energy, electric load management, storage, and energy efficiency, and she is considered a pioneer in the field of community solar. Her firm is based in Santa Fe, New Mexico.