



turn

The time is right for renewable energy

by **Bob Parkins**

When I look outside my Folsom office window, I see solar photovoltaic—or PV—panels converting the inex-

haustible power of the sun into electricity on the building's roof. I wonder, as the effects of electric utility restructuring are felt, will I see more PV panels on roofs, or will they become a good idea that never made it?

The answer to that question depends on technology, politics and business. Certainly, Federal and California state policies promote the use of non-hydro renewable resources such as PV. President Clinton's Million

Solar Roofs Initiative calls for solar panels on a million roofs by the year 2010. California Assembly Bill 1890, which restructured the state electric utility industry, directs utilities to set aside a portion of their revenues for "public benefits" purposes such as renewable energy.

However, a key word in restructuring is "competition." Utilities are taking a harder look at bottom lines and making business decisions based on short-term costs. Admittedly, PV costs more now than other sources of energy. But the price gap is narrowing. PV manufacturers are refining processes and reducing costs. As demand and supply grow, the cost for PV systems could drop by one half within five years, making them very competitive in the marketplace.

So what does this mean to Western? What role, if any, should Western play in supporting renewable energy other than hydropower?

As part of DOE, Western supports the Million Solar Roofs Initiative. We're also accountable to Executive Order 12902 and the Energy Policy Act of 1992, both of which encourage non-hydro renewable energy as Federal policy. Finally, our mission statement is to "market and deliver reliable, cost-based hydropower and related services." West-

ern's emerging PV program is accomplishing these goals.

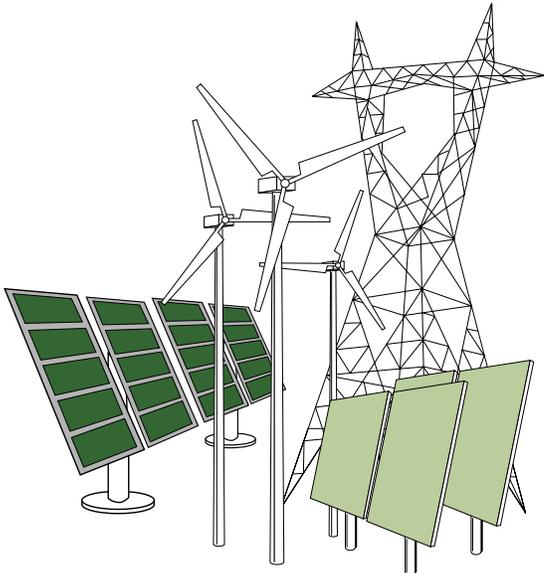
Randy Manion, Western's non-hydro renewable program lead; **Vicki Ponce**, a Utility Photovoltaic Group board member; **Peggy Plate**, founding organizer of the Photovoltaic Services Network; and **Krishna Shah**, my SN partner, are all doing their parts to establish Western's reputation as a PV leader among Federal agencies.

We are making a difference. In SN, we are installing demonstration projects as an educational tool for our customers and the public. We are providing technical and program support to help customers develop their own PV programs, assisting in research and finding outside grants for our customers to fund their own PV projects. These activities collectively support the national goal of promoting renewable energy for a cleaner environment and a more secure economy, as well as Western's mission of service to its customers.

So what's next? To use an analogy, I wonder if the employees of AT&T asked themselves a similar question when technology gave birth to the cellular phone. Yes, the first cellular phones had limited range and were too expensive for anything except a few critical uses. They apparently were not a threat to wires as a provider of communication. But what about today? You can see shoppers in supermarkets calling home on inexpensive cell phones to check the grocery list. Did those AT&T employees adequately anticipate and respond to technology-driven change?

PV and other renewable resources may follow a similar course. I am convinced my children—and yours—will live in houses where most of their power is generated by PV. As Federal employees dedicated to the good stewardship of our nation's resources, we can provide leadership by supporting renewable efforts and creatively expanding our customers' portfolio of services. Our hydropower resources make us a renewable energy agency. Why not build on it?

(Note: Parkins is SN's energy services manager.)



Closed Circuit

Western Area Power
Administration
P.O. Box 3402 A0600
Golden, CO 80401-0098
(303) 275-1234

<http://www.wapa.gov>

e-mail: CORPCOMM@wapa.gov

Editor: Carol Carpenter

Graphic Designer: Connie Edwards

Correspondents: Melissa Chiechi, Phoenix; David Christy, Folsom; Vicky Claassen, Huron; Darrel Crocker, Watertown; Mary D'Amato, Loveland; Ronda Price, Huron Construction; and Roberta Sweeney, Salt Lake City.