

THEME AND KEYNOTER SET FOR 7TH ANNUAL GILA RIVER FESTIVAL

Mark your calendars for the Seventh Annual Gila River Festival, to be held September 15-18. We're pleased to announce that the National Geographic Society's Freshwater Fellow Sandra Postel will give the keynote address this year. According to the Society, Pos-



SANDRA POSTEL (NATIONAL GEOGRAPHIC PHOTO)

tel "is recognized as one of the world's most respected authorities on freshwater issues and is hailed for her 'inspiring, innovative, and practical approach' to promoting the preservation and sustainable use of Earth's freshwater." She is expected to discuss her ideas for redirecting society's use and management of freshwater toward conservation and ecosystem health.

The 2011 Festival will offer an in-depth examination of what's at stake as southwestern New Mexico contemplates whether and how to use Gila River water under the Arizona Water Settlements Act. GRIP maintains that we can allocate such water for people *and* for nature. The Festival also will provide many opportunities to learn more about the Gila's natural and cultural history, the river's ecological and economic importance, and common-sense solutions to meet our water needs that work *with* the environment rather than *against* it, both saving us money and protecting the Gila.

If you're interested in volunteering for the festival, either for the planning committee or during the event itself, please call the Gila Conservation Coalition at (575) 538-8078. For more details on the Festival program, check our next newsletter or go to www.gilaconservation.org/7thannualgrf.shtml.

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SILVER CITY'S ELECTRICITY-DEPENDENT WATER SYSTEM SHOULD START BENEFITING FROM NEW SOLAR ENERGY INSTALLATIONS BY THE END OF 2011. (RICHARD MAHLER PHOTO)

OFFICE OF SUSTAINABILITY SOLAR PROJECTS UNDERWAY

WASTEWATER TREATMENT PLANT SOLAR FACILITY TO SAVE TOWN \$1.5-MILLION

by Richard Mahler, Newsletter Editor

"The little guy," notes Nick Sussillo, "has been the progenitor of the big guy — and everything that followed."

The director of the Joint Office of Sustainability for Grant County and Silver City is referring to the pending installation of a 36-panel solar system atop a new covered downtown parking structure, which led indirectly to the upcoming construction of a 4500-panel solar power unit at Silver City's wastewater treatment facility.

"Two years ago there was no large-scale solar power installation in our area," Sussillo points out, and "only a few residential solar systems." Remarkably, if all goes as planned "we could have 20,000 panels installed in Grant County" in the near future, all serving public buildings and reducing government power bills.

Groundbreaking will probably occur before May 31 for the vehicle shelter at the Silver City Visitor Center, to be erected in the building's existing parking lot at Hudson and Broadway. First proposed by local resident Teri Matelson in 2009 to the Town of Silver City Climate Advisory Committee, the panels above the structure, rated at 8.28 kilowatts DC, should start generating up to 15,054 kilowatt-hours AC of electricity annually starting this summer. Sussillo says Matelson's idea "opened the conversation and created some motivation" for later proposals to add solar arrays to the city's wastewater treatment plant and water-pumping stations — put forward originally in Silver City's Climate Action Plan — as well as the county's administration building and conference center. In addition, two local school districts have announced their intent to develop solar power systems at several campuses, including Silver High and Schmitt Elementary.

In contrast to the parking structure project, which is an outright acquisition, the water treatment's solar facility will be built using solar power purchase agreements (PPAs) with private, third-party contractors. The latter, in turn, will sell power to the Public Service Company of New Mexico and deliver it directly into PNM's electricity grid. Incentives to the contractor include tax credits and Renewable Energy Credits (RECs), which the utility buys to meet their state-required percentage of renewable energy. Under terms dictated by the New Mexico Renewable Portfolio Standard (see legislature story on page 3), PNM must generate 20 percent of its power from renewable sources by 2020.

"Right now the city is paying 10.9 cents per kilowatt-hour for its electricity," explains Sussillo. "Under terms of our solar power purchase agreement, it will pay roughly six cents per kilowatt-hour, with no rate increase over the 20-year term of the [wastewater treatment] contract." With its 4500 panels generated around 200 watts each, the new system should meet about 70 percent of the load requirement for wastewater treatment. Sussillo projects a savings of about \$1.5-million over the two decades, based on a conservative estimate of a three percent annual increase in the prevailing electricity

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