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Welcome to this month's issue of *Solar Newsbriefs*, brought to you by the Washington State University Energy Program. Please feel free to forward this issue to those of your colleagues interested in solar energy. For archives of previous *Solar Newsbriefs*, visit

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Oregon News

New ODOE Report Showcases State's Changing Energy Landscape

On November 1, the Oregon Department of Energy published its [2024 Biennial Energy Report](#), featuring fundamental information and data about energy in Oregon, highlights of emerging energy resources, and foundational "Energy 101s" on current topics and technologies... The 2024 report content focuses on relevant aspects of Oregon's clean energy transition, including emerging clean resources and technologies and the challenges of a changing energy system – including customer costs, markets and demand, and transmission needs—Oregon Department of Energy, *Newsletter*, Dec 2, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

Oregon Approves State's Largest Solar Farm on 10,000 Acres of Farmland

Oregon has just approved the state's largest solar farm – and one of the country's largest – on about 10,000 acres of active farmland in Morrow County as it pushes to fulfill ambitious clean energy mandates... The mammoth project also takes a novel approach to offset the negative economic impacts to the local agricultural economy—Gosia Wozniacka, *The Oregonian/Oregon Live*, Dec 5, 2024, Updated Dec 6, 2025: [Click here to read more](#).

Oregon Solar Project will Pay \$11 Million for Ag Mitigation Projects

Despite being slated for roughly 10,000 acres of farmland, a major solar project has won approval from Oregon energy siting regulators without encountering any formal protests. An \$11 million fund to mitigate the project's impacts on agriculture might have played a role. The state's Energy Facility Siting Council cleared the Sunstone Solar Project for construction last month without any opponents challenging the proposal as part of a contested case hearing—Mateusz Perkowski, *Capital Press*, Dec 9, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

Massive Solar Project Planned for Columbia River Gorge

Planned for the stark sagebrush steppes south of Boardman is by far the largest solar project ever approved in Oregon, and possibly the largest solar project in the country. The Sunstone Solar project is expected to provide 1,200 megawatts of clean energy to the Pacific Northwest, with the first stage of construction scheduled to conclude in 2027—Garrett Andrews, *Oregon Business*, Dec 13, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

New All-Electric Apartment Building Opens in Tigard

In the Tigard Triangle — the northeast corner of town bound by Interstate-5, HWY-217 and 99W — is a building and a blueprint for zero emission operations. "[The Steward](#) is the first multi-family building in the state of Oregon to achieve path to net zero," said Josh Daniels, co-founder of DIG Real Estate. The "path to net zero" is a set of building guidelines from the [Energy Trust of Oregon](#) that sets a high bar for new development in the state when it comes to electricity usage. And while those guidelines typically come with a heavier upfront price tag, Energy Trust offsets some of that "green premium" with incentives and access to efficiency expertise—Chris McGinness, KGW-TV Portland, Dec 4, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

City Council Approves \$300 Million from Portland Clean Energy Community Benefits Fund (PCEF) for Large-Scale Transformative Projects throughout City

Today, Dec. 18, 2024, City Council today unanimously approved \$300 million for eight large-scale initiatives that will reduce carbon emissions, improve infrastructure, and create local economic opportunities in energy efficiency, construction, and renewable energy—City of Portland, Press Release, Dec 18, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

Energy Trust Receives \$25 Million to Install Solar for Portland Communities of Color, Lower-Income Families

In the coming years, more Portland families will see the benefits of solar than ever before. In a historic investment, the [Portland Clean Energy Benefits Fund](#) is awarding more than \$55 million to Energy Trust and other local organizations to connect communities of color and households experiencing lower incomes to solar energy through the installation of rooftop solar and large community solar projects—Energy Trust of Oregon, *Blog*, Dec 19, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

Largest Solar Power Farm in US Coming to Oregon

Utility developer Pine Gate Renewables received [approval](#) in November from the State of Oregon's Energy Facility Siting Council to construct what it says will be the nation's largest solar farm. The North Carolina-based company projects its new Sunstone Solar Project will feature about 4 million solar panels and produce 1.2 GW of power, enough to power about [800,000 homes](#) or 10 very large data centers annually. The facility will be constructed on a strip of land previously used for dryland wheat farming near the Columbia River in Morrow County, about 185 miles east of Portland, next to the Boardman Bombing Range, used by the United States Navy—Kendra Chamberlain, *Columbia Insight*, Dec 26, 2026: [Click here to read more.](#)

TC Chevy Raises More Solar Arrays in Green Drive to Hit Net Zero

Ashland's TC Chevy has shifted into high gear on sustainability, becoming a shining example of clean energy innovation with the addition of three new Stracker solar arrays to its existing five units. The dealership now is in a position to run entirely on sun power, achieving net-zero status and proving that the road to a greener future starts at home. The dealership now is in a position to run entirely on sun power, achieving net-zero status and proving that the road to a greener future starts at home—Jim Flint, *Ashland.news*, Dec 30, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

Washington State News

La Conner School District Takes Next Step Toward Solar

The La Conner School District has taken another step toward the use of solar energy in one of its buildings. The district announced last week that it issued a request for proposals for the design and installation of a solar energy system at La Conner Middle School. The system is part of a larger townwide effort to use renewable energy and designate school buildings and the La Conner Fire Station as central hubs for residents during emergencies. "This solar plus storage system will serve as a local example of the power of renewable energy and its role in building a sustainable future," read a Nov. 21 district [news release](#)—Emma Fletcher-Frazer, *Skagit Valley Herald*, Nov 29, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

Bremerton Takes Steps toward Energy Resilience with Solar Initiative

As demand on the West Sound power grid rises due to population growth, extreme weather, and transit electrification, the City of Bremerton is advancing plans to ease the strain. A \$100,000 grant from the Washington State Department of Commerce will fund a feasibility study to explore installing solar panels and energy storage systems at city facilities. The Bremerton City Council approved the grant on November 6—Kitsap Economic Development Alliance, *News*, Nov 19, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

Methodist Church to Get Solar Panels, Thanks to Teen Grant Writer

Methow Valley United Methodist Church (MVUMC) will get solar panels next spring, to power the church during community emergencies and effectively eliminate its electricity bill. Much of the credit for this boon goes to the pastor's daughter, a high schooler who wrote the successful application for a \$667,135 grant that will pay for the solar panel and battery system—Ralph Schwartz, *Methow Valley News*, Dec 5, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

DOE Seeks Experts in Renewables Siting to Advise 13 State Collaboratives

The U.S. Department of Energy has issued a call for experts in renewable project siting to provide technical assistance to collaboratives in 13 states [included is Washington], shown in the image above. DOE expects to fund each collaborative to help communities better plan for the development of large renewables and storage projects—William Driscoll, *pv magazine*, Dec 9, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

Major New Office Building Nears Opening on Washington Capitol Campus

With large windows, solar panels and no water leaks, the Irving R. Newhouse Building is a far cry from the 90-year-old structure it replaces. It will house offices for state senators—Jerry Cornfield, *Washington State Standard*, Dec 9, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

Solar Energy, New Buses Lead Bellingham Public Schools' Progress on Sustainability Goals

With focuses on solar energy installation, air quality monitoring, facilities improvements and transportation updates, the Bellingham Public Schools (BPS) district is sharing recent progress toward its [sustainability goals](#) as part of its 2023-2028 Climate Action Plan... The district was awarded a \$2.7 million grant last summer from the Washington State Department of Commerce to install solar panels on five of its schools... The DOC Community Decarbonization Grant, as it's called, will cover the complete cost of the installation at Options High School, Shuksan Middle School and Alderwood, Cordata and Happy Valley elementary schools—Rachel Showalter, *The Bellingham Herald*, Dec 16, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

Power for All: Why Washington Needs Community Solar to Advance Equity and Justice : Opinion

Through the Community Solar Washington Coalition's work with some of the largest housing authorities in Washington state, we witness firsthand the challenges faced by the communities we serve. Families living in affordable housing often struggle to afford essential services like electricity, paying a much larger portion of their income on energy expenses than their higher-income neighbors. Mason Rolph and Derek Chernow, *The News Tribune*, Dec 18, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

Central Washington Solar Project Receives RD Funds

On Thursday, the USDA announced a \$78.3 million investment through the Powering Affordable Clean Energy program [PACE], which includes \$4 million bound for Washington. Cunningham Solar is slated to use those funds to develop nearly three megawatts of solar energy in the central part of the state. USDA's Rural Development said this project will connect with Big Bend Electrical Co-op to distribute power to homes in Washington. The Department added the project will create approximately 20 short-term construction jobs and supports the state's goal of achieving a greenhouse gas emissions-free electricity supply by 2045—Glenn Vaagen, Pacific Northwest AG Network, Dec 20, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

Tribes Sue after Massive Wind Farm in Washington Gets Green Light

In late October, Gov. Jay Inslee, D, approved a proposal for the Horse Heaven Hills project, a [massive clean energy development](#) in central Washington. Now, the Confederated Bands and Tribes of the Yakama Nation are appealing the decision in court, alleging that the decision-making process sidestepped state law and failed to mitigate potential damage to the tribe's treaty-protected natural and cultural resources... The project, first submitted in 2021 by Boulder-based developer Scout Clean Energy, proposed leasing 72,500 acres of land just south of Washington's Tri-Cities. It included three solar arrays and more than 200 wind turbines and would ultimately be able to generate roughly 1,150 megawatts of electricity — enough to power about 1 million homes—Natalia Mesa, *High Country News*, Dec 20, 2024: [Click here to read more.](#)

Greater Pacific Northwest and National News

Power Companies Eye Changes to Billing for Solar-Energy Homes

Rooftop solar panels have proven popular investments with homeowners, despite long investment-recoupment periods, typically 15 to 20 years. Homeowners are compensated by their electric utility for the power they generate but don't use, creating an incentive to install home generation like solar panels. This year, the Boise-based Idaho Power Company, which also has about 20,000 customers in eastern Oregon, changed its compensation formula to, it says, better reflect real-time power use. This has the effect of lowering the total monthly compensation amount to customers with solar installations—John Harrison, *Columbia Insight*, Nov 14, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

Community Solar Is Filling an Important Gap in the Clean Energy Transition

Solar growth has soared over the past few years. With new projects coming online this year, experts predict that U.S. solar power generation [will grow 75%](#) from 163 billion kilowatt hours in 2023 to 286 billion kWh in 2025. It has been an important part of the Biden Administration's plan to eliminate fossil fuels as a [form of energy generation by 2035](#). And on either end of the spectrum, both small-scale individual rooftop solar panels and large-scale utility solar arrays have benefited from incentives to increase solar, including tax credits from the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). But over a third of Americans rent, and [over half of](#) homeowners can't use their individual rooftops to capture the sun's energy—Sarah Sax and video by Andrew D. Johnson, *Time*, Dec 10, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

A Solar-Powered Economy

In the weeks leading up to the 2024 US presidential election, *pV magazine USA* held a three-day virtual event convening industry leaders to discuss solar, energy storage, and more. The Republicans will soon hold power in the United States. While the party has historically been fossil fuel-friendly, and hard on renewables, the undeniable value of solar has created a strong foothold in the energy market. Solar represented roughly 60% of new electricity generation capacity added in the United States in 2024—Ryan Kennedy, *pV magazine*, Dec 13, 2024: [Click here to read more](#).

\$100 Million Funding Opportunity For Solar that Benefits Wildlife and Agriculture

The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) Solar Energy Technologies Office announced the [Solar with Wildlife and Ecosystem Benefits 2 \(SolWEB2\) notice of funding opportunity](#), which will award up to \$11 million to improve the compatibility of large-scale solar (LSS) facilities with wildlife and agriculture. The funding intends to support research and development, technical assistance, and stakeholder engagement activities... Prior to submitting a full application for this opportunity, a mandatory concept paper is due on February 14 at 5 p.m. ET. SETO will host an informational webinar on January 9 at 3 p.m. ET to discuss the funding opportunity and the topic areas—Anne Fischer, *pV magazine*, Dec 24, 2024: [Click here to read more and register for the webinar](#).

Upcoming Conferences and Webinars

Bridging the Gap: How Emerging State Policies are Making Energy Storage More Affordable and Accessible : Webinar Jan 7, 2025

Energy storage will play a key role in the transition to renewable energy, and it's important that its benefits are accessible to all... A [recent report](#), jointly published by the Clean Energy States Alliance (CESA) and Sandia National Laboratories, highlights emerging strategies used by the leading states to advance energy storage adoption in underserved and low-income communities. In this webinar, report authors will discuss the emerging practices and lessons learned from the states—Clean Energy Group: [Click here for more information and to register](#).

Solar and Battery Storage to Support Community Preparedness and Disaster Response : Webinar Jan 15

An increase in severe weather events, combined with aging energy infrastructure, is resulting in more frequent and longer duration power outages. Low-income communities, communities of color, and medically vulnerable populations are especially vulnerable. Solar paired with battery storage (solar+storage) can provide emergency backup power support to the community service providers and first responders serving these communities—Clean Energy Group webinar: [Click here for more info and to register](#).

Solar Power and Energy Storage Mountain West : Denver, CO, Jan 20-22, 2025

Presented by the Colorado Solar and storage Association (COSSA), this conference is designed to advance your understanding of new policies and opportunities to equip your business with the necessary skills to compete in the ever-developing clean energy industry. [Click here for more information and to register](#).

Intersolar & Energy Storage North America (IESNA) : San Diego, CA, Feb 25-27, 2025

Intersolar & Energy Storage North America offers clean energy professionals an unmatched opportunity to gain critical insights, make impactful connections, source quality products—and have fun. This Flagship Expo & Conference will deliver a nationwide look into solar, storage, EV charging infrastructure, and manufacturing at federal and state levels. [Click here for more information and to register](#).

Oregon Solar + Storage Conference: May 13-15, 2025

A conference promoting, clean, renewable solar and storage technologies in the state of Oregon. [Click here for more information](#).

RE+ Northwest: Tacoma, WA, Jun 11-12, 2025

Meet with regional and national companies, understand cutting-edge policy, trends, and know-how, and connect with colleagues from your region. [Click here for more information](#).

2025 Community Solar Innovation Summit: Denver, CO, June 26-27, 2025

The only national conference put on by the community solar industry for the community solar industry. [Click here for more information and to register](#).

ASES Solar 2025: Innovation for Universal Renewable Energy Access: University of Colorado, Boulder, Aug 4-6, 2025

This year's conference, themed "Innovation for Universal Renewable Energy Access," will explore the latest, most impactful, cutting-edge practices, policies, and technologies driving the just and equitable transformation in the U.S. and worldwide to a carbon-free global energy economy. Click here for more information. [Click here for more information.](#)

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