

THE DURANGO HERALD

Algae fuel plant

Southern Utes' plan an innovative addition

Article Last Updated; Sunday, November 16, 2008

As lawmakers, utility companies, scientists and entrepreneurs attempt to find ways of diversifying energy sources, there are opportunities for innovation that can both meet energy needs and generate revenue for those who provide new sources. An algae fuel plant slated to be built near Ignacio on the Southern Ute Indian reservation is a welcome example in this region.

The 10-acre facility will produce an oil from algae that can be converted into diesel fuel - a commodity in steep demand. The algae facility will be built by Solix Biofuels. The company is now operating a prototype in Fort Collins that produces 1,500 gallons of biodiesel per acre of algae per year. Solix hopes the Ignacio facility will improve on that rate, which already is far above the yield of canola-based biofuel plants that typically yield 150 gallons per acre per year. The San Juan Bioenergy facility in Dove Creek uses locally grown canola, sunflowers and safflowers but currently is producing food oils, not fuel.

Solix's condensed production level also likely makes planning for and building such a facility an easier endeavor than finding a site for traditional biodiesel plants, which require more space.

Finding alternative ways of producing the energy Americans demand is an important endeavor. Bringing those methods - and the economic development that accompanies them - to rural communities is a similarly important goal, particularly in the face of nationwide economic woes.

The Solix plant is a welcome contribution toward both ends.

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