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Solar Millennium changes Blythe project to photovoltaic

Panels instead of troughs may mean fewer jobs, less water use

Solar Millennium's Blythe project is changing from solar thermal to photovoltaic.

Solar Trust of America, the parent company of Solar Millennium, announced the technology change Thursday, saying at least half of the 1,000-megawatt project located eight miles west of Blythe will now use solar panels rather than the more complicated and expensive solar troughs originally planned for the site.

Company officials cited current economic conditions as the reason for the change.

"In light of our change in technology, we now plan to finance the facility in the commercial bank market," Uwe T. Schmidt, chairman and CEO of Solar Trust, said in a statement released Thursday.

Solar Trust broke ground on the Blythe project in June with U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar and Gov. Jerry Brown in attendance, heralding it as the largest utility-scale project in the world. It was also in line for \$2.1 billion in federal loan guarantees.

The environmental and economic impacts of the technology change are uncertain, but going to solar panels means less complicated construction and possibly fewer jobs.

The environmental impacts may also be lighter since solar thermal requires large amounts of water to operate compared to solar panels, which need minimal amounts to keep panels clean.

