

South Mississippi Electric rolls out solar power sites

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(Photo: American file photo)

South Mississippi Electric recently celebrated the first solar power generation facilities on the [Mississippi Gulf Coast](#) with ribbon cutting events at Coast Electric Power Association in Kiln and Singing River Electric Power Association in [Lucedale](#).

The smaller-scale installations of 100 kW or less are the first two of five such facilities SME plans to construct and operate. SME is a generation and transmission cooperative providing electricity to 11 distribution cooperative members, which include Coast and Singing River Electric Power associations. All cooperatives are owned by their members.

Not-for-profit cooperative SME announced in June 2015 that it would build the facilities and begin operations in first quarter 2016. Coast and Singing River Electric both agreed to provide land for the facilities, which are located next to their respective headquarters.

Solar is considered one of the leading forms of green, or environmentally friendly, energy. Panels are used to collect sunlight that is converted into electricity.

"South Mississippi Electric has entered the solar power generation business," said [Jim Compton](#), SME's general manager and CEO. "Our members have expressed a strong desire for renewable energy to be a larger part of our generation mix. Today we took one step toward accomplishing that goal, but not the last."

Each of the solar sites is approximately one-half acre in size and contains 360 panels. The smaller sites will allow SME and its members to better determine optimum location, best technology and proper configuration for larger, utility-scale facilities. The events were attended by elected officials, business leaders and chamber members.

"Solar will enable South Mississippi Electric to diversify their energy generation and lessen the impact to our members of a price increase from any one source" said Mike Smith, Singing River Electric's CEO and general manager. "We also see the solar facility as a great opportunity for education and a new learning experience for our local students."

Singing River Electric today serves 73,000 members located in South Mississippi. Coast Electric provides electricity to more than 80,000 members in South Mississippi.

"Coast Electric continually strives to improve the quality of life of our members and make our communities better places to work and live," said Bob Occhi, Coast Electric's president and CEO. "Solar power will provide an environmentally friendly source of electricity and one of our principles is concern for the community, and that benefits everyone."

SME plans additional solar sites at Southern Pine, [Coahoma](#) and Delta Electric Power Associations, and those should be operational in the coming months. SME, with assistance from the National Renewable Cooperative Organization, spent several months studying various options and researching proposals for construction of the facilities. Atlanta-based Hannah Solar was selected to construct and oversee the projects.

Additionally, SME has announced a partnership with Origis Energy USA for a large solar facility in [Lamar County](#). The 52-MW location will be built and operated by Origis. SME has committed to purchase all electricity generated at the site.

SME provides electricity to 423,000 customers across 55 counties in the state. The company has a diverse energy portfolio that includes natural gas, coal, nuclear, hydropower and solar. This diversity prevents SME from becoming reliant on one energy source and manages fluctuations in prices.

"We believe that sunny days are ahead for the company and our members," said Compton. "Our cooperatives are committed to the betterment of our ratepayers, their communities and their environment. This is just the first of many positive steps we expect in 2016."

For more information about South Mississippi Electric or future updates on this project, please visit www.MyElectricCooperative.com (<http://www.MyElectricCooperative.com>).

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