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For Immediate Release – March 6, 2015

Renewable Taos Project Wins RMI eLab Invite

Taos Team Will Join National Experts For Renewable Energy Transition Planning

Taos, NM – The Rocky Mountain Institute (RMI) and its Electricity Innovation Lab (eLab) recently selected the **Renewable Taos Project** to join teams from throughout the USA who are “...leading the most impactful and innovative projects at the distribution edge of the electricity system.” These teams are all creating groundbreaking electricity system solutions based on new utility business models for building and distributing locally generated renewable energy. The 12 teams will meet at Sundance Mountain Resort, Utah during March 23-26, 2015.

“We are honored to be selected for this prestigious program,” said Bob Bresnahan, Co-Founder of Renewable Taos. “RMI is a world leader in transforming global energy use to create a clean, prosperous and secure energy future. The eLab is an assembly of thought leaders and decision makers from across the USA electricity sector. Our successful application is based on establishing the Kit Carson Electric Cooperative (KCEC) service area as a new energy innovation district. Taos has a long history of leadership in solar energy. Our acceptance by the eLab is recognition of contributions of Taos area pioneers in off-grid and grid-tied solar, and the accomplishments of KCEC in smaller utility-scale solar projects. We want to help lead Rural America into the age of renewable energy.”

“The **Renewable Taos Project** is to be applauded. It has been an extremely competitive process,” according to Martha Campbell, Senior Associate for Communities at RMI. “We look forward to working with the Taos team in preparation for eLab Accelerator.”

The Renewable Taos Project core team members are: Luis Reyes, CEO of KCEC; Valerie Espinoza, New Mexico Public Regulation Commission; Andrew Gonzales, Town of Taos Councilor; Jay P. Levine, Levine Mesa Web and Board Member, Renewable Taos; Doug Danley, Technical Liaison, Renewable & Distributed Energy, National Rural Electric Cooperative Association (NRECA); and David Torres, Board of Trustees, District 1, KCEC. Energy Consultant Bill Brown of Arroyo Hondo is the Team Coordinator.

“It speaks well of the State of New Mexico to be selected from a field of so many applicants,” stated Public Regulation Commissioner (District 3) and Renewable Taos Project core team member Valerie Espinoza. “I look forward to joining the national experts as we plan for more renewable energy distribution in our future. New Mexico should be on the forefront of the push toward solar power.”

Renewable Taos began working with RMI advisors in the summer of 2014 to determine ways to supply Taos area energy demands with renewables. “We know our local area has renewable energy resources to economically power all our demands for electricity, heat, and transportation for decades to come,” said Jay Levine. “Our work with RMI is a huge boost in overcoming policy obstacles to a clean energy future.”

“Our vision for our energy future is based on building a locally operated microgrid where renewable energy is generated and distributed within our service area,” said team member Luis Reyes. “We began building a microgrid in earnest in 2009 when the solar array at UNM-Taos went online. Today, we generate nearly 6 megawatts of power from four large solar arrays, several smaller arrays like the ones at Taos Charter School, Taos Eco Park, and KCEC, and nearly 250 residential and business solar arrays.”

“KCEC has almost maximized the amount of local solar power it can generate under the terms of its contract with Tri-State Generation and Transmission Association (Tri-State). Tri-State recently approved our request to install three community solar arrays in our service area that will generate an additional 1.5 megawatts,” said Reyes. “However, we need to have a new and better contract with Tri-State or another wholesale electricity provider in order to move forward with our community’s demands for substantially more renewable energy.”

“Renewable Taos’ modeling efforts for KCEC show we can generate the bulk of our energy demands from solar arrays, and sell our excess generation to the regional grid,” said John Gusdorf, Renewable Taos Co-Founder and Energy Analyst. “Our local demand peaks in the winter months, whereas grid demand in most of New Mexico peaks during the summer due to the use of air conditioning. A local microgrid could produce income from our solar power generation in excess of our demands throughout more than half the year.”

“The bulk of our work involves policy and contract changes plus community outreach,” says Bob Bresnahan. “The technical aspects of renewable energy are well known and widely demonstrated. In addition to negotiating a new contract with Tri-State or another wholesale electricity provider, we need to dispel misinformation about the costs, reliability, and grid impacts of renewable energy. Power purchase agreements (PPAs) for solar power can guarantee low and predictable rates for the next three decades or more. We can easily meet most of our electricity and other energy demands without affecting local grid stability or reliability.”

“Our core team will be six members who will attend RMI’s problem solving sessions at Sundance in Utah in late March,” said Team Coordinator Bill Brown. “Our overall work with RMI, however, will continue well into the future and involve many other political and business leaders and citizens through our region. All local governments in the KCEC service area that signed a Joint Resolution on Renewable Energy will participate. We will involve major players from the State of New Mexico and from the renewable energy groups of large utilities like Tri-State and PNM. The momentum of what we have already done locally is having an impact on the way these large utilities are thinking about their futures. The move to business models based on clean-energy microgrids is well underway in both the USA and the world. What we are doing here in Taos is a leading example of what is possible for all of Tri-State’s member Rural Electric Cooperatives (RECs), and RECs and municipal utilities across the country.”

“We have to be realistic as we phase into the renewable energy realm,” Commissioner Espinoza said. “We’re ready to shift to the age of the new millennial. We all want a cleaner environment, and we need to appeal to the newer generation of energy consumers. I am honored to partake in such a distinguished group of experts to research innovative solutions as we transition into the future of the new energy economy.”

For more information, visit <http://renewabletaos.org> and <http://www.rmi.org/elab>

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