



REDWOOD COAST
Energy Authority

Community Choice Energy Turns Three

The Redwood Coast Energy Authority Celebrates Humboldt County's Recent Energy Program Accomplishments and Future Objectives

When the Redwood Coast Energy Authority (RCEA) launched its Community Choice Energy (CCE) program May 1, 2017, it was based on a community vision that Humboldt County would have greater control over its electricity generation options, the electricity would have a higher renewable content, and it would cost a little less. CCE revenues would provide direct benefits to customers, develop the local workforce, and would be reinvested in the community. Three years later, the innovative program is delivering on those goals.

RCEA continues to serve over 62,000 customers, which is about 93% of Humboldt County electricity customers. [Rates](#) are currently 1% less than that of bundled PG&E customers, and those savings have added up to a cumulative savings for RCEA customers of \$4.9 million through the end of 2019.

The program also directly benefits CCE customers by way of providing energy efficiency services, a net energy metering program for solar customers, public charging stations for electric vehicles, and customer rebates. The most recent rebate program rolled out this Earth Day, April 22, offering up to \$500 on qualifying [electric bicycles](#). More RCEA rebates will be released in the months ahead to support homes and businesses with energy efficiency and low-emissions transportation options.

“Central to the goals of the CCE program is to provide both environmental and local economic benefits to the community,” said RCEA Executive Director Matthew Marshall. “Since its launch in 2017, the program has been able to retain and accesses a total of over \$51 million of investment in direct, local economic benefits to Humboldt County through customer rate-savings, program spending and matching outside grant funding, local power-procurement, and allocations toward building a reserve/contingency fund.”

The “choice” in Community Choice has meant that community members have had a clear voice in RCEA’s decision-making processes. During the summer and fall of 2019, RCEA’s [strategic plan](#) was updated with input from six public workshops, monthly public [Board meetings](#), and hundreds of written comments. RCEA’s 14 [Community Advisory Committee](#) (CAC) members, appointed by the Board of Directors, meet quarterly and for special sub-committee meetings to discuss current opportunities and priorities. A few notable outcomes include a resolution for 100% renewable energy for all customers by 2025 (20 years sooner than the State’s target), the formation of a [Citizen Sourcing](#) process to solicit ideas for local programs, and ongoing, in-depth discussions on the use of biomass for local electricity generation.

In three short years, RCEA has taken important strides to encourage new electricity generation projects. Three new community-scale solar projects are about to be built in Humboldt County through RCEA's [Feed-in Tariff Program](#), which encourages local renewable energy development. In April, the RCEA Board approved contracts with developers to build two one-megawatt solar arrays outside of Blue Lake and another one-megawatt project outside of Hydesville. These three solar arrays will power the equivalent of 1,200 homes in Humboldt County and will be online in the fall of 2021.

The [Redwood Coast Airport Microgrid](#) project is a partnership with the Schatz Energy Research Center at Humboldt State University, PG&E, and the County of Humboldt to build a 7-acre, 2.5 MW solar array and battery energy storage system at the California Redwood Coast – Humboldt County Airport. The County is providing the land, RCEA will own and operate the solar and battery systems, PG&E will provide connection to the larger grid, and the Schatz Center is serving as the technical lead and coordinator responsible for project management, design, and technology integration. The project, which is considered by the State of California to be a model for replication throughout the state, will provide electricity to RCEA customers and, in the event of a disruption to the larger grid, the microgrid will have the ability to island and provide emergency power to the airport, Coast Guard, and another facilities.

RCEA's largest project so far will be a new 100-megawatt (MW) project in Kern County. A 15-year power purchase agreement was approved by the RCEA Board in April and the project is planned to be built and operational in 2022. RCEA will take 100% of the energy produced from this project; watch for more details coming soon.

In September of 2019, RCEA also signed a 15-year power purchase agreement with Snow Mountain Hydro for its Cove hydro project, an existing, seasonal, 5.6 MW run-of-the-river project in Shasta County. RCEA began receiving the full power output of the project in March of 2020. Small, low-impact hydro projects like Cove qualify as renewable energy under state standards.

When Humboldt County's Community Choice Energy was launched in May of 2017, the only utility-scale source of local renewable electricity was from [biomass](#), which utilizes waste material from local sawmills. The current biomass contracts with Humboldt Sawmill Company in Scotia and DG Fairhaven Power on the Samoa peninsula are relatively short term and allow RCEA to keep options open for future efforts to diversify the local renewables portfolio. RCEA continues to recognize the environmental benefits of not having to ship waste out of the county, providing local blue-collar jobs, and supporting a viable, sustainable local wood products industry.

Looking forward, in addition to these current projects, RCEA is actively working to develop new sources of local renewable energy generation. Prominent among potential options for local projects is the prospect of [offshore wind energy](#) generation, 20 or more miles off the coast of Humboldt County. The north coast has a world-class offshore wind resource and moving forward with an appropriate and thoughtful process to pursue local offshore wind development is expected to be a key focus of RCEA's efforts and community engagement in the coming years.

RCEA's staff and Board of Directors look forward to continuing to serve the community with reliable, affordable, and renewable energy through the community choice energy program for years to come.



ABOUT RCEA:

The Redwood Coast Energy Authority is a local government joint powers agency whose members include the County of Humboldt, all local cities, and the Humboldt Bay Municipal Water District. The Energy Authority's purpose is to develop and implement sustainable energy initiatives that reduce energy demand, increase energy efficiency, and advance the use of clean, efficient and renewable resources available in the region.