

# Solar energy's greenness under scrutiny

By Todd Woody, New York Times

SAN FRANCISCO – Just weeks after regulators approved the last of nine multibillion-dollar solar thermal power plants to be built in the Southern California desert, a storm of lawsuits and the resurgence of an older solar technology are clouding the future of the nascent industry.

The litigation, which seeks to block construction of five of the solar thermal projects, underscores the growing risks of building large-scale renewable energy plants in environmentally delicate areas. On Jan. 25, for instance, Solar Millennium withdrew its 16-month-old license application for a 250-megawatt solar station called Ridgecrest, citing regulators' concerns over the project's impact on the Mohave ground squirrel.

At peak output, the five licensed solar thermal projects being challenged would power more than two million homes, create thousands of construction jobs and help the state meet aggressive renewable energy mandates. The projects are backed by California's biggest utilities, top state officials and the Obama administration.

But conservation, labor and American Indian groups are challenging the projects on environmental grounds. The lawsuits, coupled with a broad plunge in prices for energy from competing power sources, threaten the ability of developers to secure expiring federal loan guarantees and private financing to establish the projects. Only one developer so far, BrightSource Energy, has obtained a loan guarantee and begun construction.

Like so many of this state's troubles, the industry's problems

are rooted in real estate.

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