

KIUC Hits Renewable Milestone

Līhu'e, Kaua'i, HI – 2/25/2020 Kaua'i Island Utility Cooperative estimates renewable energy production reached 55% in 2019; well ahead of its own strategic goal and the State of Hawai'i's mandated benchmarks. But that's just part of the good news, according to the cooperative's president and chief executive officer, David Bissell.

“Since 2014 we've added 57 megawatts of utility-scale solar and solar-plus-storage facilities,” said Bissell. “The cost of electricity produced by those projects was lower than the cost of diesel and collectively saved our members \$3.8 million last year.” He noted that, for the average residential customer, the savings from utility-scale solar alone was roughly \$50 over the course of the year.

Getting more than halfway to the 100% mark was the cooperative's goal throughout 2019, says Bissell: “We knew it was possible and we worked hard to get there.” He notes that in 2010 KIUC had only 8% renewable generation. “If all goes as planned, we'll be approaching 80% within 4 years. We think that's remarkable by any standard.”

Bissell says the rapid increase in renewable generation is the result of a number of factors. “The board of directors set an aggressive goal for renewables back in 2008: reaching 50% by 2023. We were committed to meeting that goal.”

He also credits successful partnerships with local landowners and leading renewable companies such as Tesla and AES Distributed Energy. The cooperative's access to low-cost financing, strategic use of state and federal tax credits and the support of elected leaders at all levels were also critical to KIUC's success, according to Bissell.

KIUC's upward movement on renewable penetration and downward trend on rates is expected to continue through 2021. KIUC's latest solar-plus-storage project with AES will come on line later this year: a 14 megawatt facility on the grounds of the Pacific Missile Range Facility. Priced at less than 11 cents per kilowatt hour, energy produced at the AES PMRF facility is roughly one-third lower than the current cost of diesel.

The next large chunk of renewable generation will come from the West Kaua'i Energy Project, which is currently in the design/engineering phase. A hybrid of solar-plus-storage and pumped storage hydro, WKEP will add 20 megawatts of generating capacity and bring KIUC close to 80% renewable. If all goes well, the project will be completed within four years.

“At that point, we'll have nearly two decades to plan for and execute that final 20%,” says Bissell. “Using the strategies that have served us well and keeping an eye on evolving opportunities and technologies, we should have every expectation of success.”

(more)



The AES Lāwa'i solar-plus-storage facility can provide up to 20 megawatts of direct-to-grid power during the day, along with five hours or 100 megawatt hours of electricity for use after sunset.

Photo credit: AES

Battery storage systems such as these at the Tesla facility in Kapaia are instrumental in reducing fossil fuel use during evening peak.

Photo credit: Tesla



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