Apple plans massive solar farm in North Carolina

November 1 2011, By John Platt

Permits dug up by the Charlotte Observer have revealed Apple Inc.'s plan to build a gigantic solar farm to help power its recently built $1 billion data center in North Carolina. Apple has not formally announced the project and did not respond to the Observer's request to confirm it, but work to clear the land for construction has already begun, angering some nearby residents.

According to the plans - which are visible at the website Apple Insider (appleinsider.com) - Apple will reshape part of the slope of the 171-acre vacant lot next to its Project Dolphin data center to make it more suitable for solar panels. Engineering plans contained in the permits show that Apple would protect nearby creeks by making sure the soil moved for the project does not end up in local waterways. The permit does not mention how much of the 171 acres would be devoted to solar panels, but it does say that multiple gravel roads would be built to access the structures.

A county engineer told the paper that more formal plans for the solar farm would come when Apple files for a building permit.

The Project Dolphin data center went online this spring. The 500,000-square-foot facility is five times the size of Apple's previous data center in Newark, Calif., and will be used to power the company's new iCloud service, which offers up to 5 GB of free online storage to Apple users.

According to technology publication Ars Technica, the late [Steve Jobs](#) called the North Carolina data center "as eco-friendly as you can make a modern data center," but it was criticized by [Greenpeace](#), which pointed out that the state is powered mostly by coal (61 percent) and nuclear (31 percent) generators. Greenpeace called North Carolina the state with one of "the dirtiest generation mixes in the U.S."

The re-sloping work has not yet begun, but Apple's contractors are clearing the land and burning brush in anticipation of that stage of the project. Nearby residents told the Hickory Daily Record that smoke and ash are drifting across their properties 24 hours a day. "They told us they would have a fire, and only do it when the wind's blowing away," Zelda Vosburgh told the paper. "They do it 24 hours a day. The house inside smells like smoke. I don't know if it's hurting us, breathing it 24 hours a day. Between the smell and the smoke, it's bad." Vosburgh and other locals also told the paper that the clearing process is pushing snakes and other wildlife onto their land.

According to the Hickory Daily Record, construction-related fires like this cannot be started before 8 a.m. and new material cannot be added to existing fires after 6 p.m., but they do not need to be doused at night. A public information officer told the paper that wind cannot be blowing toward nearby houses at the time any fires are started.

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