Huge US solar plant lags in early production

November 17 2014, by Michael R. Blood

This Aug. 13, 2014 photo shows an array of mirrors at the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating site in Primm, Nev. The largest solar power plant of its type in the world, promoted as a turning point in green energy, isn't producing the expected energy and one of the reasons is as basic as it gets: The sun isn't shining as often as expected. (AP Photo/John Locher, File)

The largest solar power plant of its type in the world—once promoted as a turning point in green energy—isn't producing as much energy as planned.

One of the reasons is as basic as it gets: The sun isn't shining as much as expected.

Sprawling across roughly 5 square miles (13 sq. kilometers) of U.S.-government desert near the California-Nevada border, the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System opened in February, with operators saying it would produce enough electricity to power a city of 140,000 homes.

So far, however, the plant is producing about half of its expected annual output for 2014, according to calculations by the California Energy Commission.

It had been projected to produce its full capacity for 8 hours a day, on average.

It could take until 2018 for the plant backed by $1.6 billion in federal loan guarantees to hit its annual peak target, said NRG Energy Inc., which operates the plant and co-owns it with Google Inc. and BrightSource Energy.

In this Feb. 11, 2014, file photo, made with an extreme wide-angle lens, Jeff Holland takes a picture of some of the 300,000 computer-controlled mirrors that reflect sunlight to boilers that sit on 459-foot towers at the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating site in Primm, Nev. The largest solar power plant of its type in the world, promoted as a turning point in green energy, isn't producing the expected energy and one of the reasons is as basic as it gets: The sun isn't shining as often as expected. (AP Photo/Chris Carlson, File)

In this Feb. 11, 2014, file photo, workers monitor the 300,000 computer-controlled mirrors, each about 7-feet high and 10-feet wide, that reflect sunlight into three boilers that sit on 459-foot towers, at the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating site in Primm, Nev. The largest solar power plant of its type in the world, promoted as a turning point in green energy, isn't producing the expected energy and one of the reasons is as basic as it gets: The sun isn't shining as often as expected. (AP Photo/Chris Carlson, File)

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