



## REC SOLAR ENERGY INSIGHTS

# Blog

## Q&A with Jana Ganion, Sustainability Director at Blue Lake Rancheria

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At REC Solar, we are often fortunate to work with incredibly passionate organizations driven to make an impact in the world. Jana Ganion and Blue Lake Rancheria are a perfect example. REC Solar had the pleasure of building a 500kw solar array as part of a microgrid solution. This solar system, which includes energy storage, is helping power government offices, economic enterprises, and critical Red Cross safety shelter-in-place facilities across 100 acres.



Jana Ganion, Sustainability Director at Blue Lake Rancheria

Named a "Climate Action Champion" by the Obama Administration, REC Solar is pleased to help Blue Lake Rancheria achieve their sustainability goals to reduce their energy consumption 40% by 2018.

***Tell us a little about Blue Lake Rancheria and what prompted you to consider solar for your tribal community?***

The Blue Lake Rancheria (BLR) is a federally recognized Native American tribal government and community located in Humboldt County, California. BLR lands consist of about 100 acres spanning the Mad River, in a rural region between the Northern California coastal mountains and the Pacific Ocean. BLR has an aggressive energy development strategy to fulfill several goals: create economic opportunity and clean energy jobs; reduce and levelize costs of energy; reduce and eliminate carbon emissions; support and improve the distribution grid; and provide emergency power. BLR has undertaken several major energy development projects, and has been extraordinarily successful at reaching its resilience goals. As a result, BLR has earned nationwide recognition including 2015-16 White House "Climate Action Champion," and appointment to the U.S. Dept. of Energy Indian Country Energy and Infrastructure Working Group.

***Who or what acted as the primary driver(s) for having Blue Lake Rancheria go solar now?***

Going solar fulfills many of our goals mentioned earlier, including providing jobs, reducing our carbon footprint and increasing energy security. At the same time, the cost of installing solar has never been more affordable. The Tribe has looked at numerous distributed-generation energy types, and solar was by far the most cost-effective for us. Ultimately though, solar is clean energy. There are no CO<sub>2</sub> or particulate matter or other emissions, which is crucial to public health. And as an industry, the climate benefits of solar have already exceeded the carbon footprint of manufacturing all the components – in other words with carbon lifecycle accounting, from here forward, every solar panel manufactured really does reduce the amount of CO<sub>2</sub> and other causes of climate change.

***What was important to you in a solar provider and why did you decide to work with REC Solar?***

As a tribal government with many overlapping energy needs, the Blue Lake Rancheria required a robust system – one that would be able to function within a community scale microgrid for years to come. In addition to the Tribe's needs, there are also many stakeholder eyes on this project, on local, state, national, and international levels, including the California Energy Commission as the primary funding agency. We needed the workmanship to be showcase-worthy. REC Solar committed to working with us on complex integration of the solar power within our microgrid, to function with battery storage and other components. And, they designed and implemented the

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system to be resilient, with multiple inverters, bolstered for a high-hazard earthquake area, and where possible designed to keep operations and maintenance (O&M) costs low. Further, they were competitive in terms of pricing, and were clearly committed partners in working with a tribal government.

**Do you see solar as a trend that other tribal nations could leverage?**

Tribal nations have and will continue to leverage solar as a part of their energy portfolios. Solar has co-benefits of being very robust over many decades, with low O&M costs, and a high degree of reliability. Many tribes have incredible, global-leading solar resources on their lands, which create favorable development conditions. And solar arrays are a relatively simple way to create electricity for vast areas of Indian Country that are still not connected to a utility grid. The cost of pairing battery storage with solar is plummeting, helping us control the use of solar power and meet some of our specific system requirements. Further, many tribal governments are investing in workforce development and economic enterprise around solar deployment – using solar installations to train tribal members to become installers, engineers, construction technicians, and other related positions. In addition to creating direct clean energy jobs, many tribes have developed utilities and solar enterprises to create exponential economic benefit from their solar strategies. For all these reasons, solar is continuing to trend upward as the most intelligent form of energy.

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**What are the potential benefits of having solar as part of your energy plan?**

We have already seen a wide variety of benefits from focusing on solar as a keystone of our strategic energy plan. On the residential level, we have outfitted a number of homes on the Rancheria with individual arrays. On the community scale, our 500kW solar array is a pillar of our community scale microgrid, and has helped us be on track to save over \$200,000 in energy costs annually. We have created clean energy jobs as a result of our use of solar in our energy strategy, and the ultimate benefit is that we will be able to reduce our greenhouse gas emissions significantly for decades to come. New clean energy jobs + emergency power + lower energy costs + climate action = smart.

To learn more about the Blue Lake Rancheria, visit <http://www.bluelakerancheria-nsn.gov>

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Want to talk to one of our solar energy experts?  
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