

Fort Benning solar project begins commercial operation



Georgia Power's solar plant at Fort Benning covers about 200 acres at sprawling U.S. Army complex near Columbus, Georgia.

By Kirk Martin

Monday, Feb. 15, 2016 – A 30 megawatt solar generation installation at Fort Benning, the first of five large-scale solar projects on the state's military bases, is now in commercial operation. The Benning solar project has achieved “substantial completion” and entered commercial operation Dec. 31, said Scott Mayo, generation support manager. Although the construction contractor is continuing with performance testing, the site has been reliably producing power since mid-November.

“Every day, as the sun rises, we see the power ramp up,” Mayo said. “It has achieved the designed 30 megawatt (MW) capacity, and we do get some production from Benning even on cloudy days.”

Early power generation profiles from the Benning site have confirmed what Georgia Power engineers already knew about solar generation: The peak periods of generation from the sun do not align with peak demands from customers.



“As people start to wake up in the early morning and turn on electrical devices, solar production is just starting to ramp up. Then, at the end of the day, as solar drops off, customers are back home and usage goes up again,” Mayo said. “As we get more solar generation online, it's going to redefine how we operate in many ways. We'll need generating units to be there when solar production is down, and that's going to be a complex task for our control center.”

Built on a budget of \$71.6 million, the Benning site comprises 136,192 south-facing solar modules covering about 200 acres at the sprawling U.S. Army complex near Columbus, Georgia. Each panel is about 4 feet by 6 feet and can generate 305 watts with adequate sunshine.

The Fort Benning project is Georgia Power's largest owned and operated solar generation site to date, although similar 30 MW installations are expected to be in operation at Fort Gordon near Augusta and Fort Stewart near Savannah by September of this year, all three part of the company's "3x30" partnership with the U.S. Army. Additional agreements with the U.S. Navy call for Georgia Power to develop a 46 MW solar facility at the Marine Corps Logistics Base near Albany and another 30 MW project at the Naval Submarine Base Kings Bay near St. Marys.

A ribbon-cutting ceremony for the Fort Benning facility is being planned for early spring, Mayo said.