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Solar pump plant coming to Roswell area

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Sustainable Resources Inc., a company on the forefront of an emerging technology involving the desalinization of brackish and salt water through solar power, was recently awarded a one-year lease by the city of Roswell on a facility east of town.

The company has committed to a five-year renewable lease on the former Roswell National Desalinization Test Facility, pending research to ensure that the building will meet its needs.

"We're currently studying the best ways to use the facility and the proper ways to invest in it," said Bill Kipnis, CEO of SRI, and added that if all goes well he wants to make Roswell the company's world headquarters.

"The company would create many long-term, meaningful and high-paying jobs," said Bob Donnell, executive director for the Chaves County Development Foundation, who has been instrumental in bringing SRI to Roswell.

SRI makes solar powered pumps for desalinization units, which filter the salt and pollutants out of salt and brackish water by pushing it through a series of membranes.

"Desalinization pumps run at extremely high pressures, 500 PSI to 1,000 PSI, in order to push the water through the membranes. The problem is that it takes a lot of energy," Kipnis said. "Typically if you look at a water desalinization plant, 40 percent of the entire cost is electricity. It's a real problem in the world."

What makes SRI unique is that it is the only company in the world with the technology to power these pumps by solar power. In many developing countries, particularly some in Africa and South America, lack of potable water is a big problem, and electricity is scarce.

"Our pumps run on steam, not electricity, and we can generate that steam with solar energy," Kipnis said. "The heat creates steam which is then superheated, and the superheated steam is the fuel for the pump."

The pumps may also be used to transport water.

Kipnis said he is looking forward to setting up operations. "We hope that our technology is not only profitable and creates jobs for Roswell, but at the same time helps provide the world a way to get clean water without electricity."

The geographical make-up of the state makes it a logical place to conduct operations. "New Mexico sits on hundreds of millions of gallons of brackish water so it's a great testing ground for technology," Kipnis said.

SRI plans to begin operations within the year. "We have our second generation prototype being manufactured right now and it will be shipped to Roswell, we hope, within six months," Kipnis said.