

Consider Mid-Level Renewable Production

RANDALL GRAY'S renewable energy location column (Jan. 29) was excellent. There are other reasons for careful location. Consider:

Most discussion about the production of renewable electricity runs large or small scale — we should either stick a lot of stuff on the roof of each of our houses, or build giant generating stations serving hundreds of thousands. There is a third leg to this tripod: Town or community-scale production, which fits in neatly with Mr. Gray's recommendations.

Single-dwelling power production sounds hip, romantic and self-sufficient, but it costs more than most of us can swing, even with generous tax breaks. Add to this the eventual cost of repair and replacement of components. And note that these seductive systems encourage rural sprawl — something most of us agree needs to be reined in, sooner or later.

As to widespread distribution, the bigger any power plant is, the more vulnerable it is to natural disaster or act of war. Long-distance transmission lines are expensive in land and materials, subject to easy sabotage and theft, are often brought down in storms and present likely radiation hazards. All this besides suffering significant power losses that only increase with distance. You could say a lot of power "falls off" those long lines.

I suggest we look closer at generating and distributing renewable-source electricity the same way we used to do with fossil fuel power — at the town- or small-city level using, let's say, those old local power plants at Raton and Algodones as size and location models.

JW MADISON
Albuquerque