Google Throws $55 Million To The Wind

MOUNTAIN VIEW, Calif. (AP) — Google Inc. is throwing another $55 million to the wind.

The Mountain View, Calif.-based Internet search giant is partnering with Citigroup Inc. to help finance the Alta Wind Energy Center wind farm in California's Tehachapi Mountains. Google has been investing hundreds of millions in wind energy as it seeks reliable new ways to power its massive server farms, or data centers, which are notorious power hogs. The clusters of computers power Google's growing array of online services ranging from Internet searches to e-mail. The simple act of typing in a Google search taps into those computing resources — and the grid that supplies energy to those machines.

A year ago, Google made its first direct investment in clean energy, buying a $38.8 million stake in two North Dakota wind farms. It stepped up its investment last fall when it joined a handful of companies investing in a proposed $5 billion network of underwater transmission lines, known as the Atlantic Wind Connection, that could bring power from future offshore wind farms to customers along the East Coast. Last month Google bought wind-generated electricity to help power a data center that's to open in northeastern Oklahoma, and invested $100 million to fund the Shepherds Flat Wind Farm in Oregon.

Google has also invested in solar energy. The latest financing of the Alta farm brings Google's total clean energy investments to more than $400 million.

The Alta Wind project, which is being built in phases, will generate 1.5 gigawatts of electricity or enough to power 450,000 homes through Southern California Edison, Google and Citi said in a joint statement Tuesday. Google and Citi are together buying the fourth phase of the project for a combined $110 million, and will lease it back to developer Terra-Gen to operate over a long-term contract.

Segments are already generating 720 megawatts of energy and another 300 megawatts will go online by the end of the year. When completed, Alta Wind is expected to increase wind industry jobs in California by 20 percent, including more than 3,000 domestic manufacturing, construction, operation and maintenance jobs.

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