

Solar panels, fuel cells may help Yuroks

Fuel cell technology developed at Humboldt State University's Schatz Energy Research Center in Trinidad may soon help ensure telephone communication for the Yurok Tribe in a remote area of the Klamath River Valley.

Tribal members living in the remote area do not have regular phone service available, but a Yurok Tribe project to establish a phone network is underway. Due to the mountainous terrain surrounding the site, a series of repeater stations are required to establish the telephone network. One of these stations, the critical one which communicates with Eureka, is being considered for the top of Schoolhouse Peak in Redwood National and State Parks.

The power system planned for this station is a photovoltaic array coupled with a battery bank. However, Humboldt County's gray winter weather requires a backup power system during the rainy season.

A gift of \$75,000 from Dr. Louis W. Schatz, the founder and board chairman of General Plastics and a longtime Humboldt State benefactor, enables researchers at HSU's Schatz Energy Research Center to design, fabricate and install a fuel cell generator to provide backup power at the station. Humboldt State will operate and maintain the system for three years.

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"The gift from Dr. Schatz enables our research team to provide the necessary power to the Yurok project cleanly and without the need for fossil fuels," said Dr. Peter Lehman, director of the Schatz Energy Research Center. "The fuel cell is important because it is a solution to the National Park Service requirement that no fossil fuels be used for the backup generator in order to keep the area pristine. This real-world application of the fuel cell technology provides a public, and perhaps lifesaving, service to local people. It will also serve as an important test and validation of the durability of fuel cells."

While final National Park Service approval has not been received to locate the station at the proposed site, Redwood National and State Parks' Superintendent Andy Ringgold supports technology that is clean and environmentally sensitive.

"The fuel cell sounds like an attractive and ideal solution for backup power," Ringgold said.

Once the review and permit process has been completed, the phone system components will be installed this summer.