

## Camp for Kids Teaches Sustainable Energy



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Renewable electricity generation and sustainable home building are among topics kids will explore this week at a summer camp run by the city Parks and Recreation department.



**Energy educator Clay Good of Anchorage, left, talks to students enrolled in a summer camp focusing on renewable electricity generation and sustainable home building, Monday near the Marine Street electrical substation. Kids in the camp are learning about energy use needs, distribution and efficiency, and are in the process of building model tiny homes with an eye to sustainable and energy-efficient construction. (Sentinel Photo by James Poulson)**

The program, for middle school age students, is coordinated with the Renewable Energy Alaska Project, an Anchorage-based nonprofit that advocates for sustainable electricity generation by hydro, solar and wind. Events for parents and other adults also are part of this week's renewable energy activities.

City of Sitka sustainability coordinator Bri Gabel said the summer camp is an extension of the Sitka Community Renewable Energy Strategy, or SCRES. Kids in the camp are learning about energy use, needs, distribution and efficiency, and are in the process of building model tiny homes with an eye to sustainable and energy-efficient construction.

"My big goal with some of this is making sure that we're kind of connecting that to our energy landscape in Sitka, which is 100 percent renewable from our two hydropower systems," Gabel said. "... These are not hypothetical things – these are all things that exist in reality... If your kid learns about weather stripping, right, they can give you a guide on how to tell if weather stripping is bad."

The 9- to 11-year old participants in the sustainable energy camp will show their model homes to the public 5 p.m. Friday at Blatchley Middle School's multi-purpose room.

Among the camp activities is a tour of the Blue Lake dam, which generates hydroelectric power for town.

Funding for this program comes from a federal Energy Transitions Initiative Partnership Project grant, coordinated by the Renewable Energy Alaska Project. REAP microgrid project manager Haleigh Reed, speaking to the Sentinel from Anchorage, said she and REAP energy educator Clay Good are taking part in the week's renewable energy activities in Sitka.

Good is helping lead the Renewable Energy Summer Camp for the kids, and Reed plans to come in on Wednesday, "and do some of the engagement on the 11th and bring some resources about energy efficiency for the parents on the event on Friday... My goal is to bring some more resources to adults to make it more of a renewable energy week for the whole community."

Prior to Friday's program at Blatchley, the city and REAP will host a gathering for adults from 5 to 7 p.m. Thursday at Harbor Mountain Brewing to discuss Sitka's electrical grid and energy use.

"The goal is to help the community understand what makes Sitka's grid unique... Some feedback we've heard is that there's some questions about how Sitka's energy is used, and how much energy Sitka has," Reed said.

This week's events are part of Sitka's second ETIPP grant; the city won the same award in 2021 and used it to study the feasibility of various electrical projects.

"This project has three main components that we're focusing on right now – the greenhouse gas inventory, community engagement and education modules," Reed said. "And so pretty much any activity that is aimed at educating the community on energy topics as well as just getting the input is within the scope of ETIPP."

Energy education, community engagement and a carbon emission inventory are all on the docket for the Sitka Community Renewable Energy Strategy later this year, too, and Gabel said carbon emission numbers are currently being compiled.

"The majority of our greenhouse gases come from our cars, our homes and our transportation, be it boat or car. But we're also looking at how this might influence larger changes, because Sitka is relying on shipping," Gabel said. "Much of our industry is from cruise lines, and so we're trying to figure out creative ways to incorporate certain scopes that are not normally incorporated into a way that is at least useful for making informed choices," Gabel said.

Unlike many places, in Sitka the largest electrical user is the general public, rather than an industry that soaks up power, she noted.

She's received local input seeking specificity in carbon numbers, and highlighted the need to include boats in a town so heavily reliant on marine transport.

Sitka's two hydroelectric dams at Blue and Green lakes southeast of town put the town at a good starting point for electrification.

"The fact that we have our energy generation at 100 percent renewable with our two dams – that already puts us way ahead of the curve. How exactly ahead of the curve? Can't quite give you a number yet," Gabel said.

More information is published on the city website at [cityofsitka.com/SCRES](http://cityofsitka.com/SCRES) and Thursday's gathering at Harbor Mountain Brewing will offer a venue for folks to dive into questions and conversations on the city's electrical generation.

Gabel noted that July isn't an ideal time for many Sitkans to participate in a public process as the summer salmon season is ongoing, and she invited the public to submit questions to [sustainability@cityofsitka.org](mailto:sustainability@cityofsitka.org) at any time. She said this week's events are just the start of a broader outreach effort that will continue through the year.

"This is the beginning of a very big push... We're treating this as an introduction of sorts," she said.