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Sun Drenched Parking Lots: A National Asset

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Whether it be photovoltaic solar or solar thermal power generation - solar power takes up a lot of space. Solar energy's footprint is large. Solar can cover considerable real estate and real estate can be expensive.

(Solar modules are expensive enough; Imagine having to purchase land on which to plant a solar park. The cost of the purchased property beneath a solar array would add to the cost of the project, adding to the cost of the power generated from it.)

Given that real estate costs real money it should come as no surprise that so many projects are built on existing roof tops, brownfields or remote, far away pieces of property. The area beneath a solar power plant must be dirt cheap, or carry no cost at all, if the project is to be economically viable.

The cost of property adds another twist to solar energy: Where can expansive solar parks be built where - generally speaking - property costs are high? Envision Solar has an idea. Rethink the air space above the nation's parking lots as a solar asset. In the car-driven US economy with its sprawling suburban shopping malls, office and industrial parks there is no shortage of tarmac on which to park cars.

Envision Solar's product was derived from a solar project at the California headquarters of Kyocera Solar's US operations: the Solar Tree (tm) a mass produced, aesthetically pleasing steel structure on which to support a solar array which both generates power and

also provides shade beneath. Planted in groups the Solar Trees become a Solar Grove(tm).

Virtually all parking lots are near a grid connection and, it's safe to say, most are near centers of commerce, industry or residential communities, all of which are ready and able to run on solar power. In short, parking lots - and other open air storage areas - are ripe for solar development.

One wonders, how much parking and storage acreage is there in this nation for potential Solar Groves? A study should be made. Consider how many parking and open air storage lots there are in the country:

- At the nation's endless shopping malls;
- Parking lots surrounding big box stores;
- Corporate and College campuses;
- Sports stadiums;
- Airport parking lots;
- Open air storage areas as part of retail operations;
- Open air storage facilities at shipping terminals.

And those are just the BIG parking lots.

Further, as space above an already developed piece of property, a site for a Solar Grove should be inexpensive if not, perhaps, free because of the added benefits to the property owner. One benefit, of course, is the clean power that's generated that can be consumed or sold back to the grid as revenue maker for the property owner. Another is the shade offered by the solar panels:

- A Solar Grove would provide shelter and shade for shoppers; A nice attraction.
- The use of solar-sheltered areas could be used for open air farmers and flea markets.
- Very soon (within another two years) Solar Groves could become plug-in points for upcoming plug-in hybrids. (An attraction for plug-in drivers.)
- For open air storage, solar trees would provide some level of protection for inventory.

The US is all about cars, trucks, roads and parking lots. Its roads have helped build a nation. Possibly now's the time for its parking lots to be more than just storage areas for cars. Parking lots could be power plants.