

Rio Tinto expands solar power capacity at Kennecott

20.01.2026 | [Business Wire](#)

[Rio Tinto](#) has energized a new 25-megawatt solar plant at its Kennecott copper operations in Utah, showcasing a circular critical-minerals supply chain in which tellurium produced at the site is used to manufacture the panels now powering it.

Together with the 5MW solar plant completed in 2023, Kennecott now has 30MW of solar capacity-enough to power approximately 1,026 average American homes annually and reduce Kennecott's Scope 2 emissions by about 6% (20,000 tonnes CO₂e). This is equivalent to removing 4,400 cars from the road each year.

Construction of the 25MW plant began in October 2024 in partnership with Bechtel, was completed and commissioned in October last year, and energized in December. The new solar array includes over 71,000 panels, containing tellurium produced at Kennecott, a critical mineral for solar technology.

Kennecott began producing tellurium in 2022 as a byproduct of copper refining, making it one of only two U.S. producers of this critical mineral. Tellurium from Kennecott is converted into thin-film semiconductor materials by 5N Plus Inc. in Canada and then supplied primarily to First Solar for the manufacturing of the photovoltaic panels now installed at Kennecott, keeping the entire tellurium supply chain in North America.

Nate Foster, Managing Director of Rio Tinto Kennecott, said: "This new solar plant is more than a source of renewable power for our operations; it's a demonstration of circularity and supply chain resilience. By mining copper and tellurium, both classified as critical minerals in the United States, here at Kennecott and using that tellurium in the panels powering our site, we're proving how domestic critical minerals support renewable energy manufacturing. This approach strengthens North America's supply chain for essential resources, supports national energy security, and reinforces our commitment to a low-carbon future."

Scott Austin, General Manager of Renewables & Clean Power at Bechtel, said: "Working closely with Rio Tinto, Bechtel is proud to have delivered this project two months ahead of schedule while supporting 200 local jobs, helping bring renewable energy to the mine. We look forward to future projects together."

Gervais Jacques, Chief Executive Officer of 5N Plus, said: "Our partnership with Rio Tinto helps deliver industry-leading products that support the clean energy transition and advance national energy security. At a time when the security of critical minerals supply chains is under intense scrutiny, we're pleased to reinforce our position as a trusted partner to deliver the advanced materials this critical and growing sector depends on."

Note to editors

Copper and tellurium are both classified as critical minerals in the United States, underscoring their importance to clean energy technologies and national supply chain security. Kennecott produces both minerals and operates one of only two copper smelters in the U.S., reinforcing its role as a strategic supplier for the energy transition. Kennecott is also one of only two U.S. producers of tellurium, a key component in photovoltaic solar panels, further strengthening its contribution to domestic renewable energy manufacturing.

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Category: Kennecott

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Die URL für diesen Artikel lautet:

<https://www.rohstoff-welt.de/news/719088--Rio-Tinto-expands-solar-power-capacity-at-Kennecott.html>

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