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NEWS RELEASE

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BLM Policy Encourages Solar Energy Development on Public Lands

As part of the effort to diversify the nation's energy supply and develop renewable energy resources, the Bureau of Land Management today issued updated policy guidance for processing applications for solar energy projects on public lands.

“As technology improves and the cost of producing solar energy declines, we need to be prepared for a greater interest in locating solar energy projects on public lands,” said Deputy BLM Director Henri Bisson. “The BLM is eager to facilitate environmentally responsible solar energy development as part of our multiple-use mission.”

The BLM also continues to evaluate the feasibility of installing photovoltaic (PV) systems on administrative facilities, as well as on range improvements and resource monitoring, public safety, and recreation projects on public lands. Some 600 PV systems generating 135 kilowatts are currently installed in BLM-owned facilities, supplying nearly 200 megawatt-hours of power annually. The second phase of a contract will be awarded soon to install additional renewable energy technologies, including solar energy systems at the BLM Field Office in Medford, Oregon, and the Anasazi Heritage Center at the Canyon of the Ancients National Monument in Colorado.

Applications for commercial solar energy facilities on public lands are processed as right-of-way (ROW) authorizations under Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). The latest policy guidance directs BLM Field Offices to provide adequate resources to review and process ROW applications for solar energy projects in a timely manner. The guidance also requires the BLM to address solar development when revising or updating land use plans for areas shown to have potential for commercial solar energy development.

The policy requires appropriate stipulations in ROW authorizations to mitigate environmental impacts of projects, as well as bonding to ensure compliance and site reclamation. The guidance also describes the level of environmental review required before an authorization can be issued, and states that commercial solar energy projects will meet BLM requirements for recovery of costs associated with application processing.

Solar energy has significant potential in the Western states, where approximately 370 megawatts (MW) of solar power are currently installed. Authorizing solar energy projects on public lands is part of the BLM's effort to meet the goal Congress set in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 – seeking by 2015 to approve non-hydropower renewable energy projects on Federal lands that generate at least 10,000 MW of electricity. The BLM manages 258 million surface acres – more land than any other Federal agency – located mostly in 12 Western states, including Alaska.

The BLM manages more land – 258 million surface acres – than any other Federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1.8 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, and cultural resources on the public lands.