



BLM FACT SHEET

U.S. Department of the Interior • Bureau of Land Management • Washington, D.C., Office • 1849 C Street N.W. • Washington, D.C.

Renewable Energy and the BLM: SOLAR

Solar radiation levels in the Southwest are some of the best in the world, and the BLM manages more than 20 million of public lands with excellent solar potential in 6 states: California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah. State renewable energy portfolios, investment tax credits for solar energy projects, volatile oil prices, and international concern about global warming have all contributed toward public and industry interest in utility-scale solar energy development. Solar energy projects can provide significant amounts of electricity while emitting virtually no greenhouse gases, but they require large areas of relatively flat land, and some technologies use substantial amounts of water—a scarce commodity in the arid climates where the solar resources are the best. At this time, there are about 80 projects, totaling 685,000 acres, proposed on public land primarily in Arizona, California, and Nevada.

Solar energy development on BLM-administered lands can be approved under Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act if the proposed project is consistent with BLM's land use planning. The applicant is required to pay the BLM's costs in processing the application, and all projects require an environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act. Any entity that receives a solar energy right-of-way authorization must comply with the terms and conditions of the grant and pay fair market value for use of the public lands.

In 2010, the BLM approved the first utility-scale solar energy projects on public lands. To date, it has approved 10 such projects that include all of the technologies considered to be commercially viable (parabolic trough, power tower, dish engine, and photovoltaic systems). These 10 projects have the potential to generate 4,232 megawatts of clean, renewable energy—enough energy to power roughly 1.2 million homes. The projects range in size from a 45-MW photovoltaic system on 422 acres to a 1,000-MW parabolic trough system on 7,025 acres. In 2011, the BLM also approved linear rights-of-way that will enable the construction of 3 projects on private land. Those projects will generate another 700 MWs.

Just as with oil and gas production, not all BLM-administered lands are available for alternative energy production. Lands designated as part of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System are not open to solar energy development. In addition, some special management areas such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern may not be suitable for development. These areas are generally identified in existing BLM's existing Land Use Plans.

The BLM is in the process of preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development (Solar PEIS) that could result in land use plan amendments identifying lands open and closed to utility-scale solar energy development and the establishment of mandatory design features and new policies applicable to all solar energy development on BLM-administered lands. After reviewing comments on the Draft PEIS, the BLM and its co-lead Federal agency, the Department of Energy, decided to make adjustments to the Solar PEIS that will better meet the BLM and DOE's solar energy program objectives. A targeted Supplement to the Draft Solar PEIS that includes modified and new components of the proposed solar program will be available in October 2011 for a 90-day public comment period. To learn more, go to the project Web site: <http://solareis.anl.gov>.

Updated October 2011

