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Interior Releases Updated Roadmap for Solar Energy Development

*Supplement to Draft Solar PEIS offers solid foundation for landscape-level
planning in six western states*

WASHINGTON – As part of President Obama’s commitment to developing our domestic energy portfolio, including our clean energy resources, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today made public a supplement to the federal plan to facilitate responsible utility-scale solar development on public lands in six western states – Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico and Utah.

The revised plan, the Supplement to the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Solar Energy Development (Solar PEIS), reinforces and improves upon Interior’s work to establish meaningful solar energy zones with transmission solutions and incentives for solar energy development within those zones. The blueprint’s early, comprehensive analysis will ultimately make for faster, better permitting of large-scale solar projects on public lands.

“Our partners in this effort have suggested ways to strengthen the proposed solar energy program and increase certainty regarding solar energy development on public lands,” Secretary Salazar said. “This Solar PEIS establishes for the first time a blueprint for landscape-level planning that will help facilitate smarter siting of solar energy projects. Today’s announcement lays a solid foundation for an enduring, sustainable solar energy future for our nation.”

To ensure that proposed solar energy zones are located in appropriate areas, the Supplement sets forth a more complete description of the process for identifying zones, including an analysis of transmission availability and potential resource conflicts. The Supplement also describes in more detail the incentives for developers to site new projects in solar energy zones – including greater certainty and shorter permitting times – and it identifies on-going regional planning processes that are being used to identify additional solar energy zones.

The *Federal Register* Notice of Availability for the Supplement begins a 90-day public comment period, after which Interior's Bureau of Land Management (BLM) will prepare a Final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement and Record of Decision.

"Public involvement has been a vital component in every step of our solar energy program," said BLM Director Bob Abbey. "We'll use the public input from the upcoming comment period to ensure solar development on public lands is 'smart from the start.'"

More than 80,000 comments were received on the [Draft Solar PEIS](#), which BLM developed with the Department of Energy and published on December 17, 2010. After analyzing those comments, gathering additional data and consulting with cooperating agencies and resource managers, the BLM has modified its preferred alternative to include 17 solar energy zones, totaling about 285,000 acres potentially available for development within the zones. The BLM refined or removed zones that had development constraints or serious resource conflicts.

The modified preferred alternative also establishes a variance process, going forward, that will allow development of well-sited projects outside of solar energy zones on an additional 20 million acres of public land. BLM Priority Projects that are already being processed will not be subject to the proposed new variance process.

The Supplement makes clear that Interior's solar program will incorporate other, state-based planning efforts to establish additional solar energy zones. Planning efforts that are currently looking at establishing new zones include: the Arizona Restoration Energy Design Program, the West Chocolate Mountains Renewable Energy Evaluation, and the California Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan. The Supplement also makes clear that there is opportunity for industry, the public and interested stakeholders to propose additional zones for consideration.

As it completes the Solar PEIS, Interior will continue to focus on its parallel, priority initiative to process existing applications for renewable energy development on public lands in a coordinated, focused manner with full environmental analysis and public review. In the past two years, Interior has approved 22 major renewable energy projects, including 13 commercial-scale solar energy facilities that combined will create about 8,600 construction and operational jobs and produce nearly 5,000 megawatts of energy, enough to power approximately 1.5 million American homes.

"Between the proposed solar energy zones, the flexible variance process, the additional state-based planning efforts, and the commitment to process pending applications, Interior is taking an 'all-hands-on-deck' approach to building a strong solar energy economy now and into the future," said Deputy Secretary David J. Hayes.

"Tapping the vast potential of solar resources in the Western states will go a long way to diversifying the country's energy portfolio and re-establishing our position as a clean energy leader in a global market worth trillions of dollars in the long term," said U.S. Energy Secretary Steven Chu. "Advancing the deployment of utility-scale solar projects will not only help provide clean power to local utilities, it will also drive down the cost of solar energy and create American jobs in the rapidly-growing clean energy economy."

Click [here](#) for the Supplement.

Click [here](#) for a map.

Click [here](#) for a Q & A document.

The preferred method of commenting is using the online comment form at <http://solareis.anl.gov>. Written comments also may be sent to Solar Energy Supplement, Argonne National Laboratory, 9700 S. Cass Avenue—EVS/240, Argonne, Illinois 60439. In addition, comments may be submitted at public meetings scheduled for Las Vegas, Nevada (11/30); Phoenix, Arizona (12/1); El Centro, California (12/7), and Palm Desert, California (12/8). More details on the public meeting are [here](#).
