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Salazar Authorizes Landmark Wyoming Wind Project Site, Reaches President's Goal of Authorizing 10,000 Megawatts of Renewable Energy

WASHINGTON, DC – Advancing President Obama's all-of-the-above strategy for expanding domestic energy resources, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced that the Department has reached the President's goal of authorizing 10,000 megawatts of renewable power on public lands with the approval of the Chokecherry and Sierra Madre Wind Energy Project site as suitable for wind energy development. The Project is a proposed complex that could generate up to 3,000 megawatts of power in southeastern Wyoming. The project developers expect the proposal to create an estimated 1,000 construction, operation and maintenance jobs and generate enough energy to power nearly 1 million homes.

“When President Obama took office, he made expanding production of American made energy a priority, including making our nation a world leader in harnessing renewable energy. Tapping the vast renewable energy resources on our nation's public lands will create jobs while supporting a clean energy future,” said Salazar. “Wyoming has some of the best wind energy resources in the world, and there's no doubt that this project has the potential to be a landmark example for the nation. President Obama challenged us in his State of the Union address to authorize 10,000 megawatts of renewable energy on our public lands by the end of the year – enough to meet the needs of more than 3 million homes – and today we are making good on that promise.”

Since 2009, Interior has authorized 33 renewable energy projects, including 18 utility-scale solar facilities, 7 wind farms and 8 geothermal plants, with associated transmission corridors and infrastructure that will enable the projects to connect to established power grids. When built, these projects will provide more than 10,000 megawatts of power, or enough electricity to power more than 3.5 million homes, and would support an estimated 13,000 construction and operations jobs according to project developers. These achievements build on the historic expansion of renewable energy under President Obama, with energy from sources like wind and solar doubling since the President took office.

Today's decision authorizes the BLM to proceed with site specific environmental analysis for the Sierra Madre Wind Farm, the Chokecherry Wind Farm, the internal haul road, the internal 230 kilovolt transmission line, the rail distribution facility, and substations to connect the generated power to the electric grid. The Record of Decision also approves amendments to the BLM's

Rawlins Resource Management Plan, identifying the project area as available for wind energy development. The BLM Rawlins Field Office oversees more than 3.5 million acres in Albany, Carbon, Laramie and Sweetwater counties.

Additional environmental reviews will be needed for the specific turbine layout. The BLM will continue to engage stakeholders as these additional reviews are carried out.

The proposed Chokecherry and Sierra Madre project would consist of two sites encompassing up to 1,000 wind turbines on approximately 219,707 acres of land. The project, to be located about 10 miles south of Rawlins in Carbon County, will be developed in phases and operated by Power Company of Wyoming LLC. When constructed, the wind complex is expected to have a footprint of less than 2,000 acres.

At peak construction, project developers believe the project will create an estimated 1,000 full-time jobs; when operational, the facility is expected to employ 114 permanent workers. The complex could generate between \$291 and \$437 million in annual property taxes to Carbon County over 20 years. The Power Company of Wyoming estimates that this project will contribute \$232 million in sales and use taxes to Carbon County; and an estimated \$149 million to the State of Wyoming over 20 years for electricity generation tax.

“The Bureau of Land Management is committed to responsibly developing renewable energy on our country’s public lands,” said BLM Acting Director Mike Pool. “That includes an extensive environmental review and making sure that we’re mitigating the potential impacts of energy development on our wildlife and our lands.”

The proposal was evaluated under Interior’s “Priority Projects” approach to processing existing applications for renewable energy development on public lands in a coordinated, focused manner with extensive environmental analysis, public review and landscape-level planning.

The Record of Decision and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) reflect more than four years of environmental data-gathering, analysis, public input and collaboration among federal, state and local cooperating agencies – with the BLM serving as the lead agency responsible for preparing the EIS in compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act. Cooperating agencies included the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service; the Wyoming Industrial Siting Commission; the State Historic Preservation Office, Advisory Council on Historic Properties and Carbon County. Additionally, on October 2, 2012, the Carbon County Commissioners approved a special use permit for the project.

In close consultation with the BLM and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the developer will design an Avian Protection Plan and an Eagle Conservation Plan, including measures to avoid, minimize and mitigate impacts to all avian and bat species. The project will avoid Sage-Grouse Core Areas through a conservation plan that accommodates ongoing ranching and agricultural operations. The developers also will avoid the more sensitive viewsheds to protect tourism and outdoor recreation values. Permits to build the project will be provided on a phased basis, and will be contingent on implementation of wildlife protection measures.

“Wind energy is important for our nation’s economic health and security, as well as the health of our environment,” said Fish and Wildlife Service Director Dan Ashe. “We’re working to evaluate these projects at a landscape-level, ensuring that species needs are met along with renewable energy production goals.”

Collaborative involvement with five federally recognized tribes and state and federal agencies resulted in a Programmatic Agreement to mitigate impacts to historic and Native American resources. The tribes are Northern Cheyenne Tribe, Northern Arapahoe, Eastern Shoshone, Northern Ute, and Fort Peck Assiniboine/Sioux. The Programmatic Agreement incorporates measures to continue tribal consultation throughout the life of the project.

Today’s action is in line with the President’s direction to continue to expand domestic energy production, safely and responsibly. Since President Obama took office, domestic oil and gas production has increased each year, with domestic oil production at an eight-year high, natural gas production at an all-time high, and foreign oil imports now accounting for less than 50 percent of the oil consumed in America – the lowest level since 1995.

The Record of Decision, including the amendment to the Rawlins Resource Management Plan, will be available online at <http://www.blm.gov/wy/st/en/info/NEPA/documents/rfo/Chokecherry.html>,

For a fact sheet, click [here](#).

For a map, click [here](#).

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