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Salazar Announces Additional Steps toward Smarter Development of Renewable Energy on U.S. Public Lands

WASHINGTON, DC – Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced a number of initiatives designed to encourage rapid and responsible development of renewable energy on public lands. The proposals from the Department’s Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) and the policy guidance from the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) provide clarity and guidance to stakeholders, including developers and employees, about smart siting and effective mitigation for renewable energy projects.

“Renewable energy is a key part of keeping America competitive, creating jobs, and winning the future for our children,” said Secretary Salazar. “At the Department of the Interior, we have a responsibility to ensure that solar, wind and geothermal projects are built in the right way and in the right places so they protect our natural and cultural resources and balance the needs of our wildlife. Taken together, today’s initiatives are another positive step toward making sure we are building a clean energy economy that is smart from the start. The renewable energy conference we are hosting this week will give us an opportunity to get feedback on these initiatives as we continually try to improve our processes and build on lessons learned.”

The announcements come in advance of a conference that the Department of the Interior is hosting on February 9-10, 2011 regarding onshore renewable energy development. The conference will bring together stakeholders from all corners of the country to discuss the Obama administration’s initiative to stand up large-scale renewable energy on public lands.

The FWS today released two draft documents designed to provide agency employees, developers, federal agencies, and state organizations the information they need to make the best possible decisions in reviewing and selecting sites for utility-scale and community-scale wind energy facilities to avoid and minimize negative impacts to fish, wildlife, plants and their habitats. The documents are part of Interior’s ongoing efforts to improve siting and permitting of renewable energy projects on public lands. The guidelines will be available for public comment for 90 days following publication in the *Federal Register*.

The draft guidance is incorporated into two documents. *Draft Voluntary, Land-Based Wind Energy Guidelines* have been developed for industry to avoid and minimize impacts to federally protected migratory birds and bats and other impacted wildlife resulting from site selection, construction, operation and maintenance of land-based, wind energy facilities. The FWS also has developed peer-reviewed *Draft Eagle Conservation Plan Guidance* for wind project developers and FWS employees who must evaluate impacts from proposed wind energy projects to eagles protected by the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and other federal laws. The draft guidelines will be available later today [here](#).

“Development of wind power and other renewable energy sources is a key part of our nation’s energy strategy for the future, and we are committed to facilitating that development,” said Fish and Wildlife Service Acting Director Rowan Gould. “This guidance will help our employees work with the wind energy industry to minimize impacts to the environment, and I look forward to receiving comments from the public on these draft documents so the final guidance represents the best path forward.”

The BLM’s final policy memoranda to provide guidance to field managers in evaluating, screening and processing applications for utility-scale wind and solar energy projects on BLM-managed lands. This field guidance clarifies and improves National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) documentation; streamlines the project application review and approval process; and strengthens Plans of Development (POD) and due diligence requirements. BLM developed these policies from recommendations offered by federal and state agencies, industry and environmental groups based on ‘lessons learned’ from last year’s fast-track renewable energy initiatives. They are available at: <http://blm.gov/y15c> (National Environmental Policy Act Compliance for Utility-Scale Renewable Energy Right-of-Way Authorizations); <http://blm.gov/z15c> (Solar and Wind Energy Applications: Due Diligence); and <http://blm.gov/x15c> (Solar and Wind Energy Applications: Pre-Application Screening).

“The renewable energy industry, electric utility sector and environmental stakeholder groups are very interested in the future direction of BLM’s onshore renewable energy program, especially the processing of solar and wind energy right-of-way applications,” said BLM Director Bob Abbey. “These guidelines will help us to more efficiently use our resources in encouraging and facilitating environmentally responsible development of solar and wind power projects on our public lands.”

In 2010, the Department of the Interior approved a dozen renewable energy projects on public lands, including nine commercial-scale solar energy initiatives that combined will create more than 7,000 construction and operational jobs and produce almost 4,000 megawatts of energy, enough to power 1.2 million American homes.

Fact Sheet on Draft Voluntary Land-Based Wind Energy Guidelines:

<http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=188931>

Fact Sheet on Draft Eagle Conservation Plan Guidance:

<http://www.doi.gov/news/pressreleases/loader.cfm?csModule=security/getfile&pageid=188929>