



# BLM Fact Sheet

## Renewable Energy and the BLM: SOLAR

### (Section 211 of Energy Policy Act)

Solar radiation levels in the Southwest are some of the best in the world, and the BLM manages 22 million acres of public lands with solar potential in 6 states: California, Nevada, Arizona, New Mexico, Colorado and Utah. Between the end of Fiscal Year 2007 and Fiscal Year 2008, the number of utility-scale solar energy right-of-way applications more than doubled, from 96 to 211, most of them in California, Nevada, and Arizona. As of today, there are 147 solar applications pending. Of those, 104, comprising 1 million acres, are “first-in-line” applications. The remaining applications describe land previously applied for by a different company.

In 2009, the BLM identified 14 solar fast-track projects that could be approved by the end of 2010. Eight of these projects with a total generating capacity of 3,572 megawatts have been approved as of today.

Extension of federal tax incentives for solar energy and States’ renewable energy portfolio standards are driving 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 arid climates where the solar resources are the best.

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.

Just as with oil and gas production, not all BLM-administered lands are available for alternative energy production. Lands designated as Wilderness Areas and Wilderness Study Areas, National Monuments, National Conservation Areas (with the notable exception of the California Desert Conservation Area), National Wild and Scenic Rivers, and National Historic and Scenic Trails, are categories of land not open to solar energy development. Special management areas like Areas of Critical Environmental Concern may also not be suitable for development.

The BLM initiated a joint Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) in May 2008 for solar energy development with the Department of Energy. The PEIS will evaluate a number of alternatives to determine which presents the best management approach for the agencies to adopt in terms of mitigating potential impacts and facilitating solar energy development while carrying out their respective missions. The BLM will continue to process site-specific applications under its existing policy for solar energy development while the BLM and the DOE continue work on the PEIS. The Draft PEIS will be available for public review and comment before the end of December 2010. Public comments received to date and additional details about the PEIS can be found on the project Web site: <http://solareis.anl.gov/>.