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## News Release

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### **Interior Department Approves First Solar Energy Zone Projects** *Three Nevada Projects to Generate 440MW of Clean Energy; Streamlined Review Process Speeds Permitting*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – As part of President Obama’s [Climate Action Plan](#) to cut carbon pollution and create clean energy jobs, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell today announced the approval of the first three solar energy projects to benefit from the streamlined permitting process of the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) Western Solar Plan. When built, the three solar energy projects on public lands in Clark County, Nevada, will generate up to 440 megawatts of energy – enough electricity to power roughly 132,000 homes – and are expected to create up to 1,900 construction jobs.

The Western Solar Plan allows for a more efficient and predictable permitting process by focusing development in solar energy zones with the highest resource potential and lowest conflicts. The expedited reviews of these three projects were completed in less than 10 months, or less than half the amount of time it took under the previous project-by-project system. These reviews also include consideration of the first regional mitigation strategy for solar energy zone projects.

“Through thoughtful planning and upfront public participation, these solar projects demonstrate we can reduce permitting times, create certainty for energy developers, and achieve better outcomes for communities and the environment,” said Secretary Jewell. “Through a landscape-level approach, we are cutting carbon pollution and creating jobs through responsible solar development on our public lands.”

The new projects – Invenergy’s Harry Allen Solar Energy Center, First Solar’s Playa Solar Project, and NV Energy’s Dry Lake Solar Energy Center – were submitted for approval by the three successful bidders to a [competitive auction BLM held on June 30, 2014](#), netting \$5.8 million for solar leasing on parcels of public lands in the Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone. The auction was part of the competitive leasing process required for solar energy zones under the terms of the Western Solar Plan.

“Today’s announcement realizes the promise of the Western Solar Plan and reinforces the BLM’s commitment to smart-from-the-start renewable energy development in the West,” said

BLM Director Neil Kornze. “Projects like these demonstrate that regional planning and mitigation can achieve much faster permitting times and better outcomes. The Western Solar Plan provides a win-win approach for communities and for our public lands.”

The BLM will require a robust set of mitigation measures to avoid, minimize, or compensate for adverse impacts of the proposed development, including an offsite mitigation fee to fund mitigation projects that will compensate for unavoidable impacts as a result of the solar projects. Additionally, the BLM will require funding for long-term tortoise monitoring, post-construction monitoring of birds and bats in compliance with the approved Bird and Bat Conservation Strategy, salvage and relocation of special-status plants, and measures to reduce visual impacts.

These measures reflect the mitigation standards set forth in the Western Solar Plan and the April 2014 Regional Mitigation Strategy for the Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone. The availability of these standards in advance of the June 2014 auction allowed industry to take future mitigation costs into account when preparing to bid for parcels within the Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone.

Under the Western Solar Plan, BLM has designated 19 Solar Energy Zones covering more than 298,000 acres of public land. If fully developed, projects in the designated leasing areas could produce as much as 27 gigawatts of solar energy – enough to power about eight million homes.

Under the President’s Climate Action Plan, the Administration is taking a wide array of actions using existing authorities to reduce carbon pollution, increase energy efficiency, expand renewable and other low-carbon energy sources, and strengthen resilience to extreme weather and other climate impacts. As part of the plan, announced in June 2013, the President directed the Interior Department to approve at least 20,000 megawatts of renewable energy capacity on the public lands by 2020.

With the approval of the three Dry Lake solar projects, since 2009, the BLM has authorized 55 solar, wind, and geothermal utility-scale renewable energy projects on public lands, including associated electric transmission facilities and infrastructure to connect to established power grids, for a total of 14,599 megawatts of renewable energy capacity. When built, these 55 projects would provide an estimated 23,000 construction and operations jobs, power about five million homes, and attract private capital investments of approximately \$36.6 billion.

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