

Solar Energy Fact Sheet

Solar radiation levels in the Southwest are some of the highest in the world. The BLM manages more than 19 million acres of public lands with significant utility-scale solar energy potential in 6 states there: California; Nevada; Arizona; New Mexico; Colorado; and, Utah. Solar energy development projects on BLM lands are authorized as rights-of-way under Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) if consistent with BLM land use planning. The applicant is required to pay the BLM's costs in processing the right-of-way application, and all projects require an environmental review under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

In 2010, the BLM approved the first utility-scale solar energy projects on public lands. To date, it has approved 25 solar projects that have the potential to generate 6,319 megawatts of clean, renewable energy — enough energy to power roughly 2 million homes. The projects range in size from a 20-megawatt photovoltaic (PV) system on 100 acres to a 750-megawatt PV system on 7,700 acres. These totals include projects for which the BLM has approved rights-of-way for electric transmission lines on public lands to support solar projects on private and tribal lands.

Lands designated as part of the BLM's National Landscape Conservation System (NLCS) are not open to solar energy development. In addition, some special management areas such as Areas of Critical Environmental Concern may not be suitable for development. These areas are generally identified in existing BLM land use plans.

In October 2012, the BLM finalized a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) for solar energy development under the [Western Solar Plan](#). This plan provides a blueprint for utility-scale solar energy permitting in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah. The Plan established solar energy zones with access to existing or planned transmission, incentives for development within those zones, and a process for incorporating other zones and projects. Initially, the Plan established 17 Solar Energy Zones as priority areas for commercial-scale solar development. Since that time, two more zones have been added. If fully built-out, projects in the designated areas could produce as much as 23,700 megawatts of solar energy.

This plan is complimented by the BLM's [Solar and Wind Energy Rule](#), which became effective on January 18, 2017. The rule brings down the near term cost of the rates and fees paid by solar developers on BLM-managed land, ensures their transparency and predictability, and allows for competitive bidding processes. The rule also reduces land and resource conflicts by incentivizing the development of solar projects in designated leasing areas (DLAs). These are areas that are the most amenable to solar development from both a remediation and a generation standpoint.

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