

Solar Energy Development Programmatic EIS

Key Messages and Talking Points

KEY MESSAGES:

- The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is committed to facilitating environmentally sound renewable energy development on BLM-managed public lands including wind, geothermal, and solar energy projects.
- Working with the Department of Energy (DOE) to prepare a programmatic EIS is a necessary first step in evaluating to what extent public lands with high solar energy potential may be able to help meet the Nation's need for renewable energy. It is not intended to replace site-specific environmental review for individual utility-scale solar energy development proposals, but project-specific environmental review will be tiered to the Programmatic EIS and will be more effective and efficient as a result.
- The BLM already has 125 applications in the pipeline for solar rights-of-way covering virtually all of the most promising sites for solar energy development on BLM-managed and DOE lands and that the energy potential of these sites is enormous -- 70 billion watts of electricity, or enough to power 20 million average American homes on a sustained basis.

TALKING POINTS:

- As part of their ongoing efforts to increase domestic energy production and ensure greater energy security, the Department of Energy (DOE) and the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) have initiated a joint solar energy development programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS).
- Preparing a programmatic EIS is a necessary first step in evaluating to what extent public lands with high solar energy potential may be able to help meet the Nation's need for renewable energy.
- The joint PEIS that will be overseen by the DOE's Argonne National Laboratory will assess the environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with solar energy development on BLM-managed public land in six western States: Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah.
- The joint PEIS will also evaluate a number of alternative management strategies 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.

- A Programmatic EIS evaluates the environmental impacts of broad agency actions such as the setting of national policies or the development of programs. Being able to refer back to the qualitative assessments of impacts addressed in a programmatic EIS and the alternative approaches suggested for mitigating them can save significant time and effort if and when EIS's are required for specific projects and sites at a later date. This process is referred to "tiering project- and site-specific EIS's off of the PEIS."
- A Programmatic EIS for solar energy development would be an overarching environmental document that will include a cumulative impact analysis based on a reasonably foreseeable plan of development for solar energy. It will form the analysis from which BLM can decide to amend relevant Land Use Plans through a record of decision adopting policy and practices for solar energy development.
- Environmental review for specific solar energy projects would be tiered to the Programmatic EIS, resulting in a more focused and streamlined review of proposed projects.
- The BLM already has 125 applications in the pipeline for solar rights-of-way covering virtually all of the most promising sites for solar energy development on BLM-managed and DOE lands and that the energy potential of these sites is enormous -- 70 billion watts of electricity, or enough to power 20 million average American homes on a sustained basis.
- No additional applications will be accepted until after the PEIS is completed.
- Scoping is a crucial part of ensuring that any solar energy program would take into account environmental and socio-economic impacts while allowing the Nation to realize tremendous benefits in terms of energy availability, reliability and security.
- The Notice of Intent published in the *Federal Register* on May 23, 2008 opened a public comment period on the scope of the PEIS. The BLM will accept written comments related to scoping that are postmarked or delivered by July 7, 2008, and electronic comments that are received by the same date. A series of public scoping meetings to obtain comments will be held from 6 to 10 p.m. in the following locations on the dates specified:
 - Riverside, California: Monday, June 16, 2008
 - Barstow, California: Tuesday, June 17, 2008
 - Las Vegas, Nevada: Wednesday, June 18, 2008
 - Sacramento, California: Thursday, June 19, 2008
 - Denver, Colorado: Monday, June 23, 2008
 - Phoenix, Arizona: Tuesday, June 24, 2008
 - Salt Lake City, Utah: Wednesday, June 25, 2008
 - Albuquerque, New Mexico: Thursday, June 26, 2008

- Applications for commercial solar energy facilities on public lands are processed as right-of-way (ROW) authorizations under Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA). Under a BLM Solar Policy issued in April 2007, BLM Field Offices must provide adequate resources to review and process ROW applications for solar energy projects in a timely manner. The guidance also requires the BLM to address solar development when revising or updating land use plans for areas shown to have potential for commercial solar energy development.
- The policy requires appropriate stipulations in ROW authorizations to mitigate environmental impacts of projects, as well as bonding to ensure compliance and site reclamation. The guidance also describes the level of environmental review required before an authorization can be issued, and states that commercial solar energy projects will meet BLM requirements for recovery of costs associated with application processing.
- Because the BLM's efforts to evaluate solar energy development on public lands could include the establishment of a Solar Energy Development Program, a Programmatic EIS is appropriate.
- Solar energy has significant potential in the Western states. Authorizing solar energy projects on public lands is part of the BLM's effort to meet the goal Congress set in the Energy Policy Act of 2005 – seeking by 2015 to approve non-hydropower renewable energy projects on Federal lands that generate at least 10 billion watts of electricity.
- Solar is a key component of our national strategy. By Adding solar to the diversity of the energy mix will increase our energy security by:
 - Providing America with decentralized sources of clean power for the electric grid;
 - Improve our environment by reducing green house gasses 191,000 tons/year of CO₂; and,
 - Boost our economy by promoting a U.S. – based solar industry
- We want to make solar the norm and not just an “alternative” source of energy. The measures adopted as a result of this PEIS will provide consistency and certainty for solar energy development and will help expedite environmental analysis for site-specific projects in the future.