

# Solar Competitive Auction

September 2013

## ***CURRENT STATUS***

The Bureau of Land Management in Colorado will host the first competitive auction for two Solar Energy Zones (SEZ) in the San Luis Valley on Oct. 24, 2013. The sealed and oral bid auction will select a preferred applicant to submit a right-of-way application and plan of development for utility-scale solar energy projects on 3,705 acres in the De Tilla Gulch and Los Mogotes East Solar Energy Zones in Conejos and Saguache counties.

The Colorado SEZ auction will take place at the BLM Colorado State Office and will include three parcels. One for the De Tilla Gulch SEZ and two parcels in the Los Mogotes East SEZ (this parcel was divided in two due to its size). The opening bid will be determined by the minimum bonus bid or the highest sealed bid, whichever is higher. Although four SEZs were approved in Colorado, the BLM only received applications for De Tilla Gulch and Los Mogotes East. If the BLM receives applications for the Fourmile East and Antonitio Southeast SEZs, a similar competitive process would occur.

## ***BACKGROUND***

The BLM's auction announcement comes after a two-year planning effort between the Department of the Interior and the Department of Energy to pave the way for utility-scale solar energy development on the public lands. The competitive bidding process is required for new solar development applications in SEZs. On Oct. 12, 2012, Secretary Salazar signed a Record of Decision (ROD) for solar energy development in six southwestern states, which amended 89 BLM resource management plans. In Colorado, the ROD amended 13 land use plans either to allow or exclude utility-scale solar development of 20 megawatts or greater. Four Solar Energy Zones (SEZs) totaling 16,308 acres were identified for utility-scale production of solar energy in the San Luis Valley.

As part of the planning process for these areas, the BLM will also establish regional mitigation plans for all SEZs. Regional mitigation plans will simplify and improve the mitigation process for future projects in SEZs. The BLM presented a draft framework for developing regional mitigation plans for the SEZs in the Final Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS). Since the BLM will use landscape-scale assessments to establish the baseline resources for off-site mitigation costs, a Level IV Landscape Ecoregional Assessment is needed before the BLM can move ahead and process applications within the SEZs in the San Luis Valley.

The assessments look at ecological conditions and trends; natural and human influences; and opportunities for resource conservation, restoration and development. BLM Colorado is in the final stages of issuing an interagency agreement with Argonne National Laboratory that will initiate the assessment for the San Luis Valley.

