



BRIEFING STATEMENT

BLM-MONTANA/DAKOTAS

MONTANA STATE OFFICE • 5001 SOUTHGATE DRIVE • BILLINGS, MONTANA 59101 • WWW.BLM.GOV/MT

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SUBJECT: RENEWABLE ENERGY

I. SUMMARY:

Section 211 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005 tasked the Department of the Interior with approving non-hydropower renewable energy projects on the public lands producing at least 10,000 megawatts of electricity by 2015. Federal land administered by the BLM across the West will play a crucial role in achieving this goal. The BLM considers applications for wind and solar energy developments as part of its multiple use mandate under the Federal Land Management and Policy Act (FLPMA). The Montana/Dakotas BLM encourages renewable energy development to be “Smart from the Start,” in line with bureauwide policies, and will apply best management practices and other measures as necessary to provide for generation of American-made energy while protecting critical public land values.

II. BACKGROUND:

Montana and the Dakotas contain high quality wind resources for renewable energy development based on wind resource ratings developed by the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL). A “virtual” renewable energy team (RET) was established in the summer of 2010 to facilitate renewable energy development and assist with projects proposed on BLM-administered land in the Montana/Dakotas. Wind energy development is receiving a high degree of interest in all three states, though wind generation efforts are currently focused on private lands. Future applications for testing and/or development on BLM-administered land may increase depending on resolution of transmission issues; establishment of carbon credit legislation; stabilization of other federal renewable energy policy; and improvement in the economic and investment climate.

The RET in the BLM-Montana/Dakotas consists of two positions in the state office (project manager and tribal coordinator) and two positions in the Dillon Field Office (project manager and archaeologist). The Dillon positions provide support to the Mountain States Transmission Intertie (MSTI) 500 kV Transmission Line Project, an application filed by Northwestern Energy in 2008 with the capacity to serve future renewable energy generators.

Right-of-way grants for wind site testing and monitoring have been issued on BLM-administered lands in the vicinity of Bridger, Whitehall, and Glasgow, Mont., and most recently, east of Belle Fourche, S.D. None of these efforts have resulted in a wind farm development application to date, though testing is still ongoing in South Dakota.

Work continues to engage tribal groups in discussions regarding potential renewable energy development on BLM-administered lands, and to identify lands with few resource conflicts. Several resource management plans are in progress and contain analysis to ensure renewable energy objectives, especially for wind, are considered at the land use plan stage. Efforts are also underway to identify public lands that have fewer constraints than those containing priority sagebrush habitats, bald and golden eagle issues, visual resource management constraints, or other issues of concern.

III. PUBLIC INTEREST:

Public opinion related to renewable energy development on public land is varied, and processing of applications can become controversial as impacts to viewsheds, migratory birds and other wildlife, habitat fragmentation, and social and economic development issues are considered and addressed. Some segments of the public strongly support making public land available to increase the diversity of energy sources and generate local revenue, while other interests consider the tradeoffs too great. Industry interest in developing renewable energy projects on federal lands is expected to increase as wind development on private land is completed and demand for land with good wind potential grows. The BLM anticipates working with a variety of partners in the private, local, state, and federal arenas to promote responsible development and timely review of future applications in order to balance use of public land values, protect critical resources, and still achieve renewable energy goals.

CONTACTS:

Renee Johnson, Renewable Energy Lead (406) 896-5028.