

Facilitating Renewable Energy Development in Arizona: **BLM Identifies 237,100 acres of Federal Lands in Arizona for Development**

In an effort to speed up renewable energy development in Arizona, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has identified 237,100 acres of public land in the state as suitable for renewable energy development. The identification is part of the BLM's Arizona-specific Restoration Design Energy Project and was published in the BLM's Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) on February 17, 2012. The Draft EIS identifies BLM lands that are suitable for wind and solar development throughout the state, with an emphasis on previously disturbed or developed lands, and areas where the effects on sensitive resources would be minimized.

The federal government is focusing on Arizona as a potential major source of renewable energy. "With some of the most significant solar resources in the world, Arizona has great potential to build a strong renewable energy economy," according to Ken Salazar, Secretary of the Interior. The BLM plans to use the final EIS to amend its land use plans across Arizona to identify areas that are the most suitable for renewable energy projects and facilitate their development. While the upcoming amendments will only apply to BLM-managed lands, the final EIS will examine all lands in Arizona.

The Draft EIS evaluates several alternatives for identifying lands that could become Renewable Energy Development Areas (REDA) for solar and wind energy projects in Arizona. The BLM selected an alternative that focuses on lands that are within five miles of a utility corridor or existing transmission line, or an existing point of demand. The Draft EIS focuses on wind and solar development, the few BLM lands with wind potential are found in northern Mohave County, north of the Grand Canyon. The most promising area of development is solar power; BLM lands with "very good" solar potential (>7 kWh/m² per day) can be found all along the western edge of the state and in the southeast corner of the state, near Thatcher.

The Draft EIS identified 6,770 acres about 70 miles east of Yuma (known as Agua Caliente) for solar development as a "potential solar energy zone." This area has long been a rumored area for development of solar projects and under the Draft EIS is designated for the development of utility-scale solar projects. To facilitate the ongoing study of the Agua Caliente area and possible utility-scale solar development, the BLM withdrew nearly 21,000 acres of land there from mining claims for the next two years.

Publication of the Notice of Availability for the Draft EIS in the Federal Register on February 17, 2012, triggered a 90-day public comment period. Members of the public may submit comments on the Draft EIS to the BLM for consideration in the final EIS. The BLM's actions are getting early support from clean energy industry officials and environmental groups. Once finalized, the EIS should facilitate faster development of renewable energy projects on lands managed by the BLM in Arizona.

[The Renewable Arizona: Restoration Design Energy Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#) and [the Federal Register Notice of Availability](#) are now online.

Contact

Peter W. Culp
+1 602 528 4063
peter.culp@squiresanders.com

Matthew L. Rojas
+1 602 528 4055
matthew.rojas@squiresanders.com

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