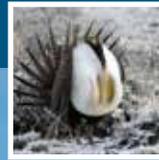


*A Brighter Future:*

# shifting the way we develop renewable energy on public lands



*“Our nation’s public lands are vast and varied. We need to take a close look at these resources to determine where it makes sense to develop renewable energy and – just as importantly – where it does not.”*

- Interior Secretary Jewell, 2013



**W**ind and solar energy have taken off in recent years, playing an important and growing role in meeting America's energy needs. Renewable energy has numerous benefits – from strengthening our economy to reducing our reliance on fossil fuels; from making our country more secure to providing pollution-free energy. As the impacts from climate change worsen with each passing year, replacing fossil fuels with clean, renewable energy will be imperative to the protection of wildlife and wildlands.

Achieving a clean energy future will take a range of approaches that emphasize improving energy efficiency and deploying renewable technologies at small and large scales. In recent years, the Department of the Interior and our public lands have begun to play a central role in this energy transition.

Renewable energy potential in the U.S. is significant, and our public lands can play an important role in helping to transition our economy to a clean energy future. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is tasked with managing 250 million acres of public lands across the west while also providing for wildlife and wildlands conservation, recreational opportunities and extractive uses. The BLM is no stranger to energy development. For over 200 years the BLM and its predecessor have overseen the extraction of coal, oil and natural gas from public lands, often with a checkered history of leasing decisions that have put energy development at odds with stewardship of wildlife, wildlands, and recreational opportunities.

Fortunately, the way we're producing energy on our public lands is beginning to shift. In the last six years, the Department of the Interior has prioritized development of renewable resources. These resources will power our country for centuries to come and ultimately allow us to move beyond fossil fuels. Just as important, a shift is also occurring in how we develop that energy on our public lands. The Department of the Interior is moving from a project-by-project approach to development, which has historically been rife with conflict, to a smarter, landscape-level approach that facilitates development in the best places while safeguarding the most important values for future generations. This new approach signals a more balanced view of how our public lands should be used.

**Shifting how we develop energy on public lands will result in a brighter future for both clean energy and conservation.**





Eagletail Mountains, © Bob Wick

## PROGRESS MADE

**I**n the last decade there has been an organized effort to leverage the abundant wind, solar, and geothermal renewable energy resources on public lands. The Interior Department was tasked with creating a program from scratch, and establishing a new way of doing business — one that set up a path to achieve clean energy goals and conserve wildlife and our public lands for future generations.

### 2005

Energy Policy Act sets a goal for the Interior Department to approve 10,000 megawatts (MW) of wind, solar or geothermal electricity on public lands by 2015 and calls for completion of programmatic environmental impact statements (PEIS) for wind and solar

### 2007

BLM establishes a Solar Energy Development Policy to address a significant increase in applications for solar development on public lands. Processing ROW applications and determining mitigation happens on a case-by-case basis

### 2009

State and federal agencies initiate development of the California Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan

### 2012

BLM commits to reviewing West-wide Energy Corridors to better facilitate renewable energy in the west

### 2006

BLM publishes a PEIS for wind development that identifies some best management practices, but does not focus wind development in low conflict areas

### 2009

Secretarial Order 3285 is issued, setting a goal to identify specific locations on public land for solar energy, encourage the timely production of renewable energy and protect natural resources

### 2010

BLM approves the first ever solar project on public lands



USAF-Wikimedia Commons

### 2012

BLM meets the goal established by Congress in the Energy Policy Act three years ahead of schedule, approving 10,000 MW of renewable energy



*“The Department of the Interior’s “smart from the start” approach to renewable energy production provides an excellent blueprint for how good planning can prevent conflict.”*

– Mike Boots, White House Council on Environmental Quality, 2014

## 2012

The Western Solar Plan, which covers six southwestern states and creates 17 Solar Energy Zones, is finalized



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## 2013

Secretarial Order 3330 calls for a landscape-scale mitigation strategy to balance development and conservation on America’s public lands

## 2014

The Interior Department issues a draft rule for leasing wind and solar energy on public lands



Duke Energy Campbell Hill Turbine, © Duke Energy

## 2015

## 2013

President’s Climate Action Plan sets a goal for the Interior Department to approve 20,000 MW of renewable energy capacity on public lands by 2020

## 2014

BLM holds the first successful competitive auction for solar energy on public lands



Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone, © Alex Daue

## 2014

BLM initiates the West-wide Wind Mapping Project to help facilitate low conflict wind development on public lands

## 2016





Alabama Hills CA, © Mason Cummings

## LAND CONSERVATION AND RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT IN A CHANGING CLIMATE

Our public lands and wildlife face a threat like we've never seen before—climate change. President Obama said in his 2015 State of the Union Address, “No challenge poses a greater threat to future generations than climate change.” Shifting away from fossil fuels and embracing a smarter approach to energy development will be critical in responding to the threat of climate change.

A smart approach to energy development will also ensure that natural systems, already stressed by a warming world, aren't further burdened. As we develop energy, being thoughtful about things like water use and altered ranges of wildlife habitat will help both human and natural communities cope with the unavoidable effects of climate change.

# A NEW MODEL FOR DEVELOPING CLEAN ENERGY ON PUBLIC LANDS

A smarter approach to development includes up-front planning to identify areas for projects that avoid impacts and environmental conflicts, developing best management practices to minimize impacts during construction and operation, establishing mitigation measures to off-set impacts that cannot be avoided and protecting areas that are too special to develop. We have an opportunity to move away from the project-by-project, or ‘scattershot’, approach that left backlogged wind and solar applications, slowed permitting and created needless environmental conflict. Embracing a new paradigm can help development proceed in an efficient manner while safeguarding wildlife and wildlands.

Keys to this new approach include:

- 1. Identifying low-conflict places and incentivizing development there:** Companies should be incentivized to develop in low-conflict areas, such as lands that are already degraded and are near roads and transmission lines.
- 2. Avoiding sensitive areas and committing to their conservation:** Areas with high conservation, recreation, wildlife and cultural value should be excluded from energy development and protected through conservation designations and management.
- 3. Minimizing and offsetting impacts:** Even appropriately sited projects leave a large footprint. Companies should be required to minimize impacts during construction and unavoidable impacts should be off-set through effective compensatory, off-site mitigation.

This approach not only provides benefits to natural resources and wildlife; it will also provide better cost and time predictability to developers looking to build wind, solar and transmission projects on our public lands. Adopting this approach will also result in consistency and efficiency in the reviewing and permitting of projects.

The Obama Administration can ensure the new approach to developing clean, renewable energy on public lands becomes the new way of doing business and simultaneously meet the goals laid out in the Climate Action Plan. The time is now to finalize the ground rules for how we develop renewable energy for decades to come. Building off the progress already made, the following efforts are instrumental to seeing this new approach succeed:

- **Finalizing the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan**

The Interior Department embarked on this historic, landscape-scale planning effort for renewable energy with the State of California in 2009. The effort, which spans more than 22 million acres, will help plan for the future of the desert by identifying areas for renewable energy development and areas critical to conserving and protecting the desert's valuable ecological, cultural, and recreational resources. The Interior Department can finish the public lands portion of this important plan before President Obama leaves office.

- **Publishing a final rule for leasing wind and solar development on public lands**

The Interior Department can improve how projects are permitted by establishing a leasing process that will promote the use of low-conflict public lands for development. Finalizing the wind and solar leasing rule would provide permitting certainty and efficiencies for companies, protect natural resources and ensure a fair return to taxpayers.

- **Using the Western Solar Plan to drive smart solar development on public lands**

The Western Solar Plan offers a blueprint for how to best site and permit solar energy on public lands. Like all blueprints, the Plan's true value lies in how it is implemented. The Interior Department can realize the Plan's full potential by ensuring that BLM land use planning efforts incorporate and utilize the Western Solar Plan. The plan should be used to identify appropriate new Solar Energy Zones and establish mitigation efforts that add predictability for project developers and conservation outcomes.

- **Finalizing the West-Wide Wind Mapping Project and using it to drive smart wind development on public lands**

As private land areas for wind development are built out, developers are increasingly looking to wind resources on public lands. The time is right to establish a guided development approach for wind that addresses impacts to migratory birds, bats and wildlands. As first steps toward a guided development approach, the Interior Department has begun to map wind resources and potential development constraints. The Department can finalize these maps and issue guidance directing field staff to use this mapping project to plan for smart wind development on public lands.

- **Making the grid work for clean energy by continuing review of West Wide Energy Corridors**

Congress tasked the Administration to designate routes for electric power lines and pipelines that cross public lands. However, routes identified were poorly sited, failed to facilitate renewable energy development and crossed many sensitive areas. The Interior Department can reverse course by identifying low-conflict passageways that will allow clean energy to access the grid in its first priority southwest region.

- **Finalizing regional mitigation guidance and demonstrating effective mitigation on pilot projects**

The Interior Department has wisely made mitigation a priority. If done right, mitigation can avoid, minimize and effectively off-set impacts while ensuring protection of natural resources. The Interior Department can follow through on the commitments made in the Secretary's first secretarial order by finalizing BLM's regional mitigation policies and setting the standard for effective mitigation on pilot wind, solar and transmission projects.



## Renewable Energy on Public Lands: By the Numbers

**0** – Solar projects approved on public land before 2010

**14** – Solar projects online or under construction through 2014

**20,000** – DOI MW goal for renewable energy permitted on public lands by 2020

**14,000** – Approximate number of megawatts permitted towards DOI's goal through 2014

**4 million** – American homes that would be powered when currently approved renewable energy projects are built and online

**19** – Solar Energy Zones designated

**7** – Solar Regional Mitigation Strategies in development



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