

Utility-Scale Solar Power on Federal Lands

U.S. Creates Clean Energy Jobs with Historic Project Permits

Overview

Some of the best solar resources in the world are located in the western United States on public land overseen by the federal government. Federal agencies developed extensive processes to authorize use of these lands for a variety of purposes, including recreation, grazing, mining, and energy development. There is great potential for these lands to produce safe, clean solar energy, yet limited agency action delayed the permitting of solar projects for years. From initial application to final Right-of-Way grant, the current process for a utility-scale solar project requires between three and five years to complete. In contrast, federal agencies approved over 74,000 permits to drill for oil and gas on public lands in the last 20 years.¹ New initiatives undertaken in 2009 led to the first-ever permits for utility-scale solar projects on public lands in 2010, totaling over 3,650 megawatts of generating capacity, enough to power over 730,000 homes.

Fast-Track Projects

On June 29, 2009, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar announced a “Fast-Track” initiative for solar project applications demonstrating the most promise to complete the necessary environmental reviews.² “Fast-track” projects did not forego environmental review requirements necessary to receive a Right-of-Way permit, but received priority processing. Nine projects completed the review process and received a Right-of-Way grant from the U.S. Department of the Interior in 2010.

Table 1 –Utility-Scale Solar Projects Permitted by the Bureau of Land Management in 2010

COMPANY	PROJECT NAME	MW	TECHNOLOGY	STATE	APPLICATION FILED	DRAFT EIS PUBLISHED	FINAL EIS PUBLISHED	RECORD OF DECISION
BrightSource Energy, Inc.	Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System Project	370	Power Tower	Calif.	11/17/2006	11/10/2009	8/6/2010	10/7/2010
Chevron Energy Solutions	Lucerne Valley Solar Project	45	PV	Calif.	12/7/2007	2/5/2010	8/13/2010	10/5/2010
First Solar, Inc.	Silver State South Solar Project	50	PV	Nev.	8/25/2008	6/30/2009	9/10/2010	10/13/2010
NextEra Energy Resources, LLC	Genesis Solar Energy Project	250	Parabolic Trough	Calif.	1/31/2007	4/19/2010	8/30/2010	11/4/2010
Solar Millennium LLC	Amargosa Farm Road Solar Project	500	Parabolic Trough	Nev.	11/20/2007	3/19/2010	10/15/2010	11/15/10
Solar Millennium, LLC/ Chevron Energy Solutions	Blythe Solar Power Project	968	Parabolic Trough	Calif.	10/22/2007	4/6/2010	8/20/2010	10/26/2010
SolarReserve LLC	Crescent Dunes Solar Energy Project	100	Power Tower	Nev.	11/6/2008	9/3/2010	12/21/2010	12/27/2010
Tessera Solar	Calico Solar Project	663.5	Dish-Engine	Calif.	3/14/2007	4/19/2010	8/6/2010	10/20/2010
Tessera Solar	Imperial Valley Solar Project	709	Dish-Engine	Calif.	1/16/2006	2/22/2010	7/28/2010	10/5/2010

The Bureau of Land Management

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), within the U.S. Department of the Interior, manages 258 million acres of land in the West. The BLM is responsible for authorizing utility-scale solar energy developments through a Right-of-Way (ROW) permit under Title V of the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) of 1976.

The Right-of-Way Approval Process

Solar energy developers must complete the following process to secure a Right-of-Way permit allowing them to develop a project on public lands:

Step 1: Submit Right-of-Way grant application (0-30 days)

- Upon submission of an application by the solar developer, BLM determines an appropriate processing fee, which must be paid by developer prior to processing.

Step 2: Submit Plan of Development (BLM's goal is 60 days, but may take 4-6 months)

- Once payment has been received for the application fees, BLM notifies the applicant in writing and requests a comprehensive Plan of Development.
- Applications are generally processed in the order they are received. Processing may be delayed as BLM specialists complete required inventories or consult with other agencies.

Step 3: Conduct environmental review (24-48 months)

- BLM publishes Notice of Intent to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) in the *Federal Register*.
- A National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) review is conducted by BLM with input from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, state, and local authorities. The process requires months of detailed surveys and analyses of the project site to identify any potential impacts. Multiple public meetings are scheduled for community input. The EIS concludes with the issuance of a Final Environmental Impact Statement. (See the NEPA Review Process above.)

Step 4: Issue Record of Decision (ROD)

- Following the successful completion of the environmental review process, inventories, and reports, the BLM will issue a Record of Decision, either granting or denying the ROW application. If granted, the applicant also receives a Notice to Proceed (NTP), allowing the construction phase to begin.

Step 5: After a ROW grant is issued

- ROW holders pay an annual rent to the United States Treasury based on the BLM's solar rent formula.³

NEPA Review Process

Notice of Intent



Scoping Process



Draft EIS



Agency and Public Review & Comment



Final EIS



Record of Decision

About the Solar Energy Industries Association

Established in 1974, the Solar Energy Industries Association is the national trade association of the U.S. solar energy industry. As the voice of the industry, SEIA works with its 1,000 member companies to make solar a mainstream and significant energy source by expanding markets, removing market barriers, strengthening the industry and educating the public on the benefits of solar energy.

For a referenced version of this factsheet and more information, please visit www.seia.org.

¹ “Number of APDs approved by Year on Federal Lands.” 2009. U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Accessed online 26 March 2010.
http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/etc/medialib/blm/wo/MINERALS__REALTY__AND_RESOURCE_PROTECTION_/energy/oil__gas_statistics.Par.5146.File.dat/chart_2009_07.pdf

² For more information on "Fast-Track" solar projects, please visit: http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/prog/energy/renewable_energy/fast-track_renewable.html

³ “Solar Energy Interim Rental Policy.” 10 June 2010. U.S. Bureau of Land Management. Accessed Online 1 August 2010.
http://www.blm.gov/wo/st/en/info/regulations/Instruction_Memos_and_Bulletins/national_instruction/2010/IM_2010-141.html