

Questions & Answers - Restoration Design Energy Project - October 2011

Q: What is the Restoration Design Energy Project?

A: The Restoration Design Energy Project (RDEP) identifies public lands across Arizona that may be suitable for renewable energy development and establishes a baseline set of environmental protection measures for such projects. The RDEP, through an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) analysis, will amend Bureau of Land Management (BLM) land use plans in Arizona. Most current plans do not address renewable energy development. Processing of applications can be lengthy, often requiring an environmental impact statement and a land use plan amendment. The RDEP will facilitate this process. Information and updates about the RDEP can be found on the project website- www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/energy/arra_solar.html.

Q: What is the scope of RDEP?

A: The RDEP will analyze the identification of lands for renewable energy (solar and wind technologies at any development scale (e.g., utility or distributed) in Arizona. Parcels of public lands may provide sufficient land for a project or may serve as a piece of multijurisdictional partnership to support renewable energy development. The Record of Decision (ROD) for the RDEP EIS will designate Renewable Energy Development Areas (REDAs) and consider establishing a Solar Energy Zone (SEZ) in support of the ongoing national Solar Energy Development Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS).

Q: What is a Renewable Energy Development Area (REDA)?

A: A REDA is an area of public lands that has been identified for renewable energy development. A REDA is not restricted to any scale (e.g., utility or distributed) or any type of renewable energy technology. REDAs will be identified based on analysis that determines they have renewable energy potential, have limited resource conflicts, and/or have been previously disturbed or damaged by past activities. These include, but are not limited to, brownfields, landfills, retired agricultural lands, and abandoned mines and lands that do not contain major resource issues such as critical habitat for wildlife or significant cultural resources. The Record of Decision for the RDEP EIS may identify REDAs on BLM-administered lands in Arizona.

Q: What is the Solar Energy Development PEIS and how does this relate to RDEP?

A: The Solar Energy Development PEIS is a programmatic analysis of utility-scale (20 megawatts or greater) solar energy development and proposed Solar Energy Program guidance for six western states (Arizona, California, Colorado, New Mexico, Nevada, and Utah). Within these six states, the BLM has identified 24 proposed Solar Energy Zones (SEZs) where solar development may be prioritized. Three of the proposed SEZs are in Arizona. A SEZ is an area of public lands that will be identified for utility-scale solar energy development. The PEIS also identifies solar development program lands where development applications may be accepted subject to a variance process and exclusion areas where solar development would be prohibited. More information on the Solar PEIS can be found at <http://solareis.anl.gov/>.

Q: What are the potential decisions to be made in the RDEP Record of Decision?

A: Whether to amend existing BLM land use plans to identify Renewable Energy Development Areas (REDAs); whether to identify a utility-scale Solar Energy Zone (SEZ); whether to make land tenure adjustments to facilitate renewable energy development; whether to establish goals and management actions for land reuse, remediation, and sustainability practices; and whether to identify design features,

best management practices, and mitigation measures for future projects. Decisions will apply only to BLM-administered lands in Arizona.

Q: What are the reasonable alternatives to be analyzed in the RDEP EIS?

A: As determined through scoping, the key issues to be analyzed through a range of alternatives are distance to energy transmission (power lines), distance to electrical load centers (where the energy is used), water consumption and protection, and land tenure adjustment. All alternatives have the common goal of protecting sensitive environmental resources and focusing on previously disturbed or low resource value lands.

Q: How do land tenure adjustments fit into RDEP?

A: BLM Arizona has a number of “disposal” parcels that have renewable energy potential and limited resource value. These lands have already been identified for disposal in existing land use plans. These lands with high renewable energy development potential could be sold or exchanged for lands with higher conservation values that support BLM’s resource management goals.

Q: How does the RDEP level of analysis differ from the Solar PEIS?

A: Both the RDEP EIS and the Solar Energy Development PEIS are programmatic, meaning they address the big picture. The Solar PEIS analyzes the impacts from utility-scale solar energy development in six western states. The analysis looks at impacts associated with different types of solar technologies (e.g., photovoltaic and concentrated solar thermal). As stated above, the Solar PEIS also provides specific detailed analysis for 24 Solar Energy Zones (SEZs), including three in Arizona.

The RDEP EIS analyzes the impacts of renewable energy development on lands in Arizona that have been previously disturbed or have low resource values. It considers a wide range of renewable energy resources and technologies, including solar-based technologies (e.g., photovoltaic, algae ponds) and wind technology, but does not include geothermal resources. The RDEP EIS will also analyze an additional SEZ in Arizona for utility-scale solar energy development.

Q: Why are Non-BLM-administered lands considered in the RDEP EIS?

A: Non-BLM-administered lands are included in the discussions and mapping in RDEP to put the BLM parcels in context with other lands having similar renewable energy development potential and few resource conflicts. The information will also help inform policymakers, landowners, and developers on potential suitable areas for renewable energy development throughout Arizona. The decisions for RDEP apply only to the BLM-administered lands.

Q: Will site-specific right of way applications require additional analysis?

A: Yes. The RDEP EIS will not eliminate the need for site-specific environmental review for renewable energy development proposals. The BLM will make separate decisions whether to authorize individual renewable energy development projects in conformance with the amended land use plans. Site-specific environmental reviews for renewable energy development projects commenced after the signed Record of Decision (ROD) could be tiered to this EIS.

Q: What’s the difference between exclusion vs. solar development program lands in the Solar PEIS? What does it mean for RDEP?

A: The Solar PEIS will identify Solar Energy Zones (SEZs) and solar development program areas in Arizona for potential utility-scale solar energy development as well as exclusion areas. Any utility-scale solar projects proposed outside of identified SEZs must follow a variance process which will be presented in the targeted supplement to the PEIS that will be published in the fall of 2011. This variance process will include requirements on solar developers to demonstrate the need to develop outside of a SEZ and that the project will minimize environmental impacts.

The RDEP is not proposing any additional exclusion areas for renewable energy development. Proposed utility-scale solar energy projects in REDAs will not require a complete variance process, as much of that work will have been accomplished through the RDEP EIS. Projects will be evaluated on a case-by-case basis to determine what additional steps may be required.

Q: What are the differences between the proposed decisions being made in the Solar PEIS and RDEP?

A:

Comparison of the Solar PEIS decisions and the RDEP decisions

Solar PEIS	RDEP
Applies to: Utility-scale solar (≥20 MW) ONLY	Applies to: All solar-based technology Wind
Identifies: <u>Exclusion Areas</u> <u>Solar Program Areas</u> variance process required <u>SEZs</u> Brenda Gillespie Bullard Wash Solar Program Policies & Procedures Design Features	Identifies: <u>Same as the Solar PEIS for ≥20 MW</u> <u>REDAs</u> (REDAs fulfill the variance process for utility-scale solar energy development) <u>SEZ</u> Agua Caliente Solar Program Policies and Procedures Wind Program Policies and Procedures Goals, Management Actions, Design Features, and Best Management Practices for solar and wind renewable energy development regardless of scale, land reuse, and remediation of disturbed sites

Q: What is the project schedule?

A: A Draft EIS is scheduled to be released in early 2012 for public review. The Final EIS/Record of Decision (ROD) is scheduled for late 2012. The Solar PEIS will issue a targeted supplemental document in the fall of 2011 with the final EIS/ROD in the fall of 2012.