U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management

Scoping for BLM's Utility-Scale Solar Energy Programmatic EIS

The Bureau of Land Management is seeking public input to support preparation of amendments to Resource Management Plans (RMPs) and an associated Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Programmatic EIS) that will evaluate the potential impacts associated with changes to utility-scale solar energy planning in up to eleven western states.

BACKGROUND

In 2012, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) signed a Record of Decision implementing solar energy policies, procedures, and land use plan amendments related to permitting of utility-scale solar energy developments in six Southwestern States (Western Solar Plan). The Western Solar Plan identified specific public lands or categories of lands in six states (Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah) where BLM: 1. prioritizes solar development (i.e., solar energy zones or SEZs); 2. may allow development in accordance with procedures in a specified variance process (variance areas); and 3. excludes utility-scale solar energy development (exclusion areas). The land areas in each category are summarized by state in the table below. Additional details about the Western Solar Plan and related planning decisions are available at blmsolar.anl.gov.

State	Total State Acreage (Public + Other Lands)	BLM-Administered Lands Potentially Available for Development (acres)	Exclusion Areas (acres)[a]	Variance Areas (acres)	SEZ Areas (acres)
Arizona	72,700,000	9,181,179	5,794,336	3,380,877	5,966
California	100,200,000	10,815,285	9,895,580	766,078	153,627
Colorado	66,500,000	7,282,258	7,170,822	95,128	16,308
Nevada	70,300,000	40,760,443	31,623,903	9,076,145	60,395
New Mexico	77,800,000	11,783,665	7,569,181	4,184,520	29,964
Utah	52,700,000	18,098,240	16,269,823	1,809,759	18,658
Total	440,200,000	97,921,069	78,323,645	19,312,506	284,918

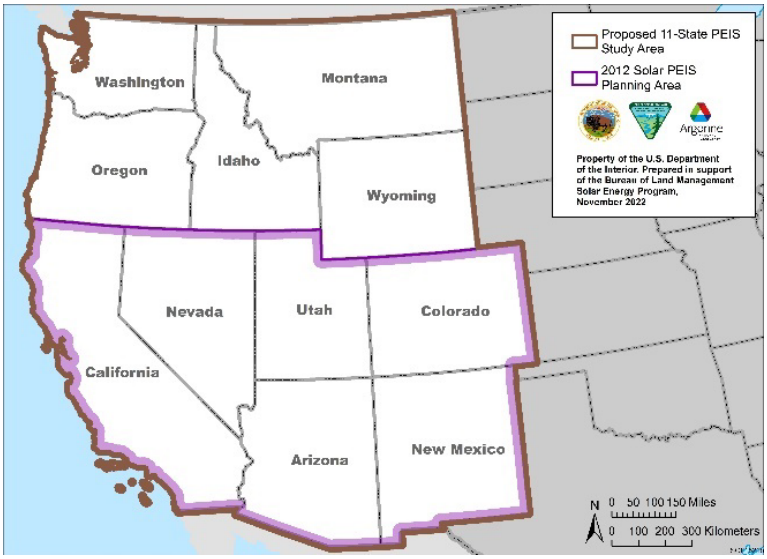
[a] The acreage estimates were calculated on the basis of the best available geographic information system (GIS) data. GIS data were not available for the entire set of exclusions. Exclusions that could not be mapped would be identified during the ROW application process. To convert acres to km^2, multiply by 0.004047.

BLM'S CURRENT SOLAR ENERGY PROGRAM

As of December 2022, the BLM has permitted 41 solar energy projects totaling more than 9 gigawatts (GW) of approved capacity (with almost 4 GW in operation). But more renewable energy is needed. The Energy Act of 2020 directs the Secretary of the Interior to seek to authorize 25 GW of renewable energy on public lands by 2025. Executive Order 14008 requires the Department to review siting and permitting processes on public lands with a goal of increasing environmentally sound renewable energy production on those lands.

Additionally, in the 10 years since issuance of the Western Solar Plan, advancements in technology, updated resource information, and shifts in energy markets suggest that it is appropriate for the BLM to review several aspects of its solar energy planning. As a result, the BLM is preparing a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Programmatic EIS). The Notice of Intent for this effort summarizes the aspects of the current program and planning that the BLM might evaluate:

- Study Area: The BLM will consider including Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming (see Map below). The BLM will also consider the extent to which lands covered by the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan in California and the Restoration Design Energy Project in Arizona should be included.
- Exclusion Criteria: The BLM will consider eliminating technology-based exclusions (Criteria 1 - excludes areas with slopes greater than five percent and Criteria 2 - excludes development where solar insolation values are below 6.5 kWh/m2/day). The BLM will also consider new or modified resource-based exclusion criteria.
- Land Use Allocations: The BLM will consider adjustments to priority, variance, and exclusion areas. The BLM will consider identifying new priority, variance, and exclusion areas in states added to the study area.
- Variance Process: The BLM will consider modifications to the variance process to focus the review and improve efficiency as well as moving the process into BLM policy.
- Definition of Utility-Scale: The BLM will consider whether to modify the definition of utility-scale developments applicable to the Programmatic EIS (solar projects with 20 or more megawatts (MW) of nameplate generation capacity under the Western Solar Plan).
- Incentivizing Development in SEZs or Priority Areas: The BLM is interested in receiving public comment on additional incentives for priority areas to encourage solar development.



HOW TO COMMENT ON THE SCOPE OF THE PEIS

The BLM is holding a series of public meetings to solicit feedback on the scope of the recently announced Solar PEIS, including two virtual meetings (one on January 12th and another on February 13th. The end of the public comment period will be 15 days after the last scoping meeting-- (projected to be **February 28, 2023)**. The public may provide comments as follows:

Online: https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510. Click on the "Participate Now" button on the left. Enter your comment and information, then click "Submit".
By Email: solar@blm.gov
By Mail: Solar Energy PEIS Scoping, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240

For Project Updates please consult the BLM National NEPA Register - Solar PEIS for this project (also accessible using the QR code).

For more information contact: Jeremy Bluma, Acting Division Chief, National Renewable Energy Coordination Office, Bureau of Land Management Headquarters · solar@blm.gov