

U.S. Department of Interior
Bureau of Land Management

For Immediate Release: May 29, 2008

Contacts: David Quick, (202) 452-5138
Linda Resseguie, (202) 452-7774

BLM Initiates Environmental Analysis of Solar Energy Development

As part of its ongoing efforts to increase domestic energy production and ensure greater energy security, the Bureau of Land Management has initiated a joint programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) with the Department of Energy (DOE) to assess the environmental, social, and economic impacts associated with solar energy development on BLM-managed public land in six western States: Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah.

“Renewable energy resources, such as solar, wind, hydroelectric and geothermal, will continue to play a larger role in meeting the Nation’s future energy needs,” said Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne. “We must use our own domestic energy resources as part of a balanced, rational and realistic national policy to secure a reliable supply of affordable energy for America’s families and businesses. Expanded solar energy development is part of the solution, placing more control over energy supply in the hands of America.”

The joint PEIS will also evaluate a number of alternative management strategies to determine which presents the best management approach for the agencies to adopt in terms of mitigating potential impacts and facilitating solar energy development while carrying out their respective missions. The measures adopted as a result of this PEIS will provide consistency and certainty for solar energy development and will help expedite environmental analysis for site-specific projects in the future.

“Preparing a programmatic EIS is a necessary first step in evaluating to what extent public lands with high solar energy potential may be able to help meet the Nation's need for renewable energy,” said BLM Director Jim Caswell. “Scoping is a crucial part of ensuring that any solar energy program would take into account environmental and socio-economic impacts while allowing the Nation to realize tremendous benefits in terms of energy availability, reliability and security.”

During work on the PEIS, the BLM will focus attention on the 125 applications already received for rights-of-way for solar energy development, while deferring new applications until after completion of the PEIS. The 125 existing applications are for land covering almost one million acres and with the potential to generate 70 billion watts of electricity, or enough to power 20 million average American homes. The PEIS will establish a process for accepting future applications, possibly through a competitive process, which is likely to attract companies with the experience and resources necessary to quickly deploy solar energy projects.

A Notice of Intent published in today’s *Federal Register* opened a public comment period on the scope of the PEIS. The BLM will accept written comments related to scoping that are

postmarked or delivered by July 7, 2008, and electronic comments that are received by the same date. A series of public scoping meetings to obtain comments will be held in the following locations on the dates specified:

- **Riverside, California:** Monday, June 16, 2008, 6:00pm
- **Barstow, California:** Tuesday, June 17, 2008, 6:00pm
- **Las Vegas, Nevada:** Wednesday, June 18, 2008, 6:00pm
- **Sacramento, California:** Thursday, June 19, 2008, 6:00pm
- **Denver, Colorado:** Monday, June 23, 2008, 6:00pm
- **Phoenix, Arizona:** Tuesday, June 24, 2008, 6:00pm
- **Salt Lake City, Utah:** Wednesday, June 25, 2008, 6:00pm
- **Albuquerque, New Mexico:** Thursday, June 26, 2008, 6:00pm

More information on the meetings will be announced through local media, newsletters and the project Web site: <http://solareis.anl.gov>.

The BLM manages more land – 258 million surface acres – than any other Federal agency. Most of this public land is located in 12 Western States, including Alaska. The Bureau, with a budget of about \$1 billion, also administers 700 million acres of sub-surface mineral estate throughout the nation. The BLM's multiple-use mission is to sustain the health and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations. The Bureau accomplishes this by managing such activities as outdoor recreation, livestock grazing, mineral development, and energy production, and by conserving natural, historical, and cultural resources on the public lands.