



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

FACT SHEET

Updated Western Solar Plan Draft Utility-Scale Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

Why is BLM proposing updates to the Western Solar Plan?

Demand for solar development on public lands is booming, and as the nation’s largest land manager BLM is uniquely positioned to support the transition to a clean energy economy as directed by Congress and the President. BLM is considering new potential areas for solar applications while adjusting for changes in the renewable energy industry to support more flexible, environmentally protective solar development on BLM public lands.

What is BLM proposing to do?

BLM’s updated Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) would expand the Western Solar Plan to include 11 states (AZ, CA, CO, ID, MT, NV, NM, OR, UT, WA, and WY), identify BLM lands where solar development is likely to encounter fewer resource conflicts, and make those lands available for application for solar development. Project-specific environmental analysis will still be required prior to any BLM decision.

What is BLM’s current Solar Energy Program?

BLM’s current Solar Energy Program, established in 2012 as the Western Solar Plan, makes about 16 million acres of public land (including priority and variance areas) in Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah available for application, with the goal of permitting solar energy development projects in an efficient, standardized, and environmentally responsible manner.

ALTERNATIVES ON WHERE TO GUIDE SOLAR DEVELOPMENT ON PUBLIC LANDS

There are roughly 162 million acres of public lands managed by the BLM in Arizona, California (excluding the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Planning Area), Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming



Updated Western Solar Plan

Draft Utility-Scale Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement

TIMELINE FOR THIS EFFORT



What is BLM considering in the Western Solar Plan through the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS?

The BLM's preferred alternative (Alternative 3) would:

- Make 22 million acres of public land open to proposals for solar development in 11 states.
- Simplify the current plan by making areas either open or closed to solar development proposals. Variance lands as a category would be eliminated.
- Drive development toward existing or proposed transmission lines.
- Exclude development on sensitive wildlife and cultural areas and on protected areas.
- Focus on photovoltaic (PV) technology. BLM has mainly received applications for PV facilities over the past 10 years.
- Apply only to solar project applications of 5 megawatts or larger.
- Allow solar development in areas with up to a 10 percent slope.
- Ensure project requirements to avoid, minimize, and mitigate adverse impacts from solar development.

No solar developments are being authorized under this planning effort. Future projects will still need to undergo environmental review before being approved.

What guidance is BLM following to modify its current Western Solar Plan?

Changes to the Western Solar Plan must adhere to the Federal Land Policy and Management Act and the National

Environmental Policy Act, which include environmental review and public involvement. The Solar Programmatic EIS examines five action alternatives, as well as a No Action Alternative that would continue BLM's existing management practices. BLM has published its Draft Solar Programmatic EIS and is seeking public comments on the proposed program.

What is the difference between the Solar Programmatic EIS and the Renewable Energy Rule?

The Solar Programmatic EIS and Renewable Energy Rule are complementary. The Programmatic EIS will update where utility-scale solar energy proposals are allowed on public land, while the Renewable Energy Rule will streamline the regulatory permitting process and lower rent and fee rates paid by solar and wind operators on public land.

What cooperating agencies have been involved with this process?

There are more than 70 cooperating agencies from the 11-state planning area, including federal and state agencies, counties, and conservation districts. These agencies were given the opportunity to review and comment on the Draft Programmatic EIS prior to its release.

How might this affect me and my community?

Clean energy is an important part of meeting the nation's energy needs and protecting against climate change. The BLM is committed to protecting the environment and health and safety

of all communities, and works to ensure that minority, low-income, and Tribal communities do not experience disproportionate adverse environmental impacts as a result of decisions and actions related to utility-scale solar energy development.

The BLM wants to hear from you!

How might updates to the Western Solar Plan impact resources that are important to you? For example:

- Air quality and climate change
- Ecological impacts (vegetation, big game, special status species)
- Socioeconomic impacts (housing, taxes, job opportunities)
- Access to recreation
- Visual impacts

Please visit BLM's ePlanning website at the link or QR code below to access the Draft Solar Programmatic EIS, register for one of the two virtual meetings, or view dates for in-person meetings.

eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510



For more information, visit blmsolar.anl.gov