

Department of Interior Streamlining Utility Scale Solar in Western States

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Federal agencies in Washington D.C. and the State of California have been concurrently developing plans to allow development and permitting of utility scale solar energy plants on public lands.

The US Department of the Interior recently [announced](#) its roadmap for solar energy development, focused on six southwestern states – Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah.

Energy Secretary Stephen Chu notes that the new roadmap identifies public lands best suited for solar energy projects, improves the permitting process, and creates incentives to deliver more renewable energy to American homes and businesses.

These efforts are reflected in a final Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to be published by the Interior Department.

Among other things, the PEIS:

- Establishes 17 initial Solar Energy Zones on 285,000 acres across 6 Western States;
- Outlines a process for proposing new or expanded zones;
- Includes incentives such as faster and easier permitting;
- Sets a clear process for development of well-sited projects on approximately 19 million acres outside the zones;
- Protects natural and cultural resources by excluding 78 million acres from solar energy development; and
- Identifies design features (best practices) to ensure the most environmentally responsible development and delivery of solar energy.

Meanwhile, the California effort is focused on solar energy development in desert regions and adjacent lands of seven California counties – Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego.

As [reported](#) by the Imperial Valley news, the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) is a collaborative effort between the California Energy Commission, California Department of Fish and Game, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

The DRECP plan is referenced by the Department of Interior in its PEIS announcement, labeling it one of the efforts already underway with respect to new or expanded zones, as the PEIS envisions.

Still, these two efforts are proceeding down separate, if related, tracks. And for now it remains unclear whether these planning strategies will be compatible.

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