

Thank you for your comment, Eileen Wynkoop.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is SolarM60257.

Comment Date: September 14, 2009 18:58:51PM
Solar Energy Development PEIS
Comment ID: SolarM60257

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Attachment: NVEnergy_Solar Study Areas Comments_SEP142009.pdf

Comment Submitted:



September 14, 2009

Solar Energy PEIS
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To Whom It May Concern:

This letter presents scoping comments from NV Energy as a result of the Notice of Availability of Maps and Additional Public Scoping for Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) to Develop and Implement Agency-Specific Programs for Solar Energy Development; Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Approach for Processing Existing and Future Solar Applications, published in the Federal Register on Tuesday, June 30, 2009. NV Energy understands this notice to be in addition to the original Notice of Intent (NOI) published on Thursday, May 29, 2008.

With respect to the original notice, NV Energy submitted scoping comments on July 15, 2008 as "*Nevada Power Company and Sierra Pacific Power Company, subsidiaries of Sierra Pacific Resources*". The tracking number assigned to this comment letter was SolarS50499. Please note that Nevada Power Company and Sierra Pacific Power Company (i.e., Sierra Pacific Resources), are now doing business as NV Energy.

NV Energy appreciates the U. S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and Department of Energy's (DOE) effort to incorporate into the PEIS the assignment of specific public lands as solar study areas with the intent to protect and preserve areas for future solar energy development, per Secretarial Order No. 3285, and using economic stimulus funding to enhance the PEIS environmental analysis. The resources used to develop the new solar study area maps included California's Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative, the Western Governors' Association Western Renewable Energy Zone and Transmission Study and existing BLM resource information. NV Energy requests that the BLM and DOE also include the State of Nevada's Renewable Energy Transmission Access Advisory Committee's (RETAAC) reports which propose recommendation for improved access to the [electrical] grid system, by which renewable energy industries can set up and have market access in Nevada and neighboring states. These reports are located at the following website: <http://www.retaac.org/>.

The Notice of Availability published on June 30, 2009 has generated some confusion among project proponents and local BLM field offices on the intent of BLM's procedures in processing solar development right-of-way applications. Consistent procedures are necessary to understand the process in filing for solar development rights-of-way within and outside of solar study areas before or after June 30, 2009.

Additionally, with respect to “*alternative procedures*” that BLM considering (i.e., non-competitive and competitive, application fees and diligent development requirements) for solar energy development applications within the solar energy study areas, it is not clear if such alternative procedures are to be subject to the PEIS analysis or if BLM is considering them separately with the intent to implement them through Instruction Memoranda or other internal policy dissemination to the field office level without the public having an opportunity to review and comment on them. It is also not clear if such procedures apply to solar energy development applications outside of the proposed solar energy study areas. If the intent is to implement nomination and competitive procedures similar to geothermal development, nominated sections are not always released in their entirety so sections originally intended to be developed become fragmented. This leads to more numerous, yet smaller footprint projects than originally planned/proposed. This also prohibits larger, more cost-effective projects to be developed. Fragmentation of land sections within good solar insolation areas could drive up the costs of projects, and ultimately the cost of the energy produced that is sold to market. Such competitive procedures could also delay viable projects from proceeding through the permitting requirements of other regulatory processes (i.e., state utility commission approvals of power purchase agreements).

Another source of confusion is the multitude of solar energy project applications that overlay each other. There seems to be an inconsistent process in which applicant might have the first-in-place rights, and how that is determined. Whether it is the application submittal date, the completeness of the application package, the payment of the processing fee, or which overlying applicant is first to achieve all of these, there seems to be no clear answer at the field office level.

The location and configurations of the solar energy study areas takes into account various important and sensitive considerations. Comparing the locations of the proposed solar study areas to the areas of currently proposed solar projects which applicants have identified for development seems to indicate an issue that should be addressed in the designation of any solar study area or zone; that being, the factors that solar project developers take into consideration when siting solar projects. Certainly proximity to existing infrastructure, slope, terrain, avoidance and/or minimization of impacts to sensitive resource areas/issues, but also how all these factors impact the price at which to competitively sell the power on the market and site constructability costs. Designating solar study areas may or may not be cost-prohibitive to a solar developer or purchaser of the power. If solar zones are designated in specific locations, they may prove to be cost-prohibitive and therefore, essentially useless for development. Additionally, although it may appear that there are transmission lines in close proximity to proposed solar study areas, they may not be able to take on the addition of new solar generation output. Extensive modeling studies must be done to assure that there is adequate capacity to interconnect the power of a new solar project to existing transmission lines. These studies take time and considerable amounts of money and may make or break an economic analysis for the project.

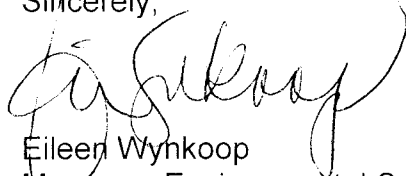
There is a critical issue for solar project developers to receive economic stimulus funding for projects to start construction before the end of 2010; however, many projects

are on a timeline that is tied to the completion of this PEIS, the schedule for which is "*to be determined*". An unknown schedule for any renewable energy project developer is detrimental for securing long-term power purchase agreements with utilities and other power purchasers. By the nature of this unknown schedule, it's possible that many solar projects will not qualify for the federal funding. The PEIS should address this issue.

Some of the proposed solar study areas have unusually irregular shapes that may not necessarily be conducive to the squared, or blocked, nature of solar project footprints. Any solar zones designated in the PEIS should take into account the adequacy and constructability of solar projects when finalizing the shape/boundary of the zones.

NV Energy appreciates the additional opportunity to participate in and provide comments to the development of the PEIS.

Sincerely,



Eileen Wynkoop
Manager, Environmental Services