



Great Basin Resource Watch

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Our mission is to protect the health and well being of the land, air, water, wildlife, and human communities of the Great Basin from the adverse effects of resource extraction and use.

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July 15, 2008

Solar Energy PEIS Scoping
Argonne National Laboratory
9700 S. Cass Avenue—EVS/900
Argonne, IL 60439

To whom it may concern,

Great Basin Resource Watch (GBRW) is not clear whether this programmatic process is needed. It seems as though existing vehicles are in place to deal with solar development as well as any other development on public lands.

We are surprised that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM)/Department of Energy (DOE) had not initiated the development of "...agency-specific programs that would establish environmental policies and mitigation strategies..." long before the date of this Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) scoping notice given that impetus is said to be derived from Executive Order 13212 (2001) and the Energy Policy Act of 2005. Why not sooner?

According to the Federal Register Notice¹, BLM has received numerous solar utility-scale projects. GBRW believes that the BLM/DOE is now looking for a way to streamline the process to catch up on the mounting backlog of proposals. Thus, we view this PEIS process as having less to do with a serious implementation of Executive Order 13212 (2001) and the Energy Policy Act of 2005, and more to do with dealing with the aforementioned backlog. We appreciate this situation, and caution that in developing programmatic programs etc. that the full environmental review of the projects is not lost.

GBRW is concerned that the BLM/DOE may end up undermining the spirit and intent of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) by developing too many preconceived programs and procedures around of solar energy utility development. Indeed, there are common elements to many of the projects in terms of requirements and impacts to the land. However, the environmental review process within NEPA should cover all elements of any facility, and be sensitive to the specific aspects of each project in terms of the nature of the project, its scale, proposed location, etc. Any project anticipated to be of significance is expected to require an EIS and thus a formal public process. There should be no diminishment as a result of this PEIS of the EIS process for any of the solar utility projects.

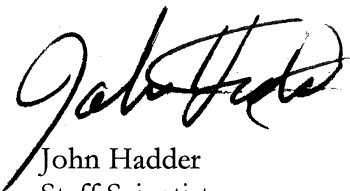
¹ Federal Register / Vol. 73, No. 104 / Thursday, May 29, 2008 / pg. 30398, "Notice of Intent To Prepare a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement To Evaluate Solar Energy Development, Develop and Implement Agency-Specific Programs, Conduct Public Scoping Meetings, Amend Relevant Agency Land Use Plans, and Provide Notice of Proposed Planning Criteria"

In terms of citing solar projects on public lands, BLM's own policy, Instruction Memorandum No. 2007-097, accompanied by the required EIS seems sufficient to handle the solar utility scale projects.

According to the notice, "...the BLM expects to identify BLM-administered land in the six state study area that may be environmentally suitable for solar energy development and land that would be excluded..." GBRW does not see that "environmentally excluded" is unique to solar-utilities. Any industrial development involves land disturbance, noise, dust, visually altered landscape, water resource impacts, etc. If the BLM is to create an excluded designation then it should apply more broadly to industrial development, whether in be solar, geothermal, coal, mineral extraction, etc.

GBRW supports categorical exclusions for all industrial development on wilderness, wildlife refuges, national monuments and parks, and special significance spiritual areas. Any exclusions beyond this should be handled within the context of the EIS process that should elucidate whether the specifics of a project will require further exclusions.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Hadder", written in a cursive style.

John Hadder
Staff Scientist
Great Basin Resource Watch

cc Roger Flynn