

Consolidated Resource Management Plan in compliance with the BLM right-of-way regulations (43 CFR 2800) and other applicable Federal and State laws and policies. In accordance with FLPMA, there is a need to consider the long-term needs of future generations for renewable and non-renewable resources in the context of the multiple resource objectives in the 2001 Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan planning area.

Preliminary Alternatives

Under the No Action alternative, the BLM would not approve the proposed Dodge Flat II Solar Energy Center on public lands that are currently excluded from utility-scale solar energy development due to slopes exceeding 5 percent and would not amend the slope management direction in the 2001 Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan. Under the proposed action alternative, the BLM would change the slope management direction in the 2001 Carson City Field Office Consolidated Resource Management Plan to allow for the Dodge Flat II Solar Energy Center to be developed as currently proposed. The BLM welcomes comments and suggestions for additional alternatives.

Planning Criteria

The planning criteria guide the planning effort and lay the groundwork for effects analysis by identifying the preliminary issues and their analytical frameworks. Preliminary issues for the planning area have been identified by BLM personnel and from early engagement conducted for this planning effort with Federal, State, and local agencies; Tribes; and other stakeholders. The BLM has identified 10 preliminary issues for this planning effort's analysis. The planning criteria are available for public review and comment on the National NEPA Register website (see **ADDRESSES**).

Public Scoping Process

This notice of intent initiates the scoping period and public review of the planning criteria, which guide the development and analysis of the RMP amendment and associated Environmental Assessment. The BLM will be holding one virtual scoping meeting. The specific date and time of the scoping meeting will be announced at least 15 days in advance through the National NEPA Register project web page <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2027081/510>.

Interdisciplinary Team

The BLM will use an interdisciplinary approach to develop the plan amendment in order to consider the variety of resource issues and concerns identified. Specialists with expertise in the following disciplines will be involved in this planning effort: air quality, cultural resources, botany, climate change (greenhouse gases), environmental justice, grazing, human health and safety, land use and authorizations, migratory birds, noise impacts, socioeconomics, transportation, visual resources, water quality, and wildlife.

Additional Information

The BLM will identify, analyze, and consider mitigation to address the reasonably foreseeable impacts to resources from the proposed plan amendment and all analyzed reasonable alternatives and, in accordance with 40 CFR 1502.14(e), include appropriate mitigation measures not already included in the proposed plan amendment or alternatives. Mitigation may include avoidance, minimization, rectification, reduction or elimination over time, and compensation; and may be considered at multiple scales, including the landscape scale.

The BLM will utilize and coordinate the NEPA and land use planning processes for this planning effort to help support compliance with applicable procedural requirements under the Endangered Species Act (16 U.S.C. 1536) and section 106 of the National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. 306108) as provided in 36 CFR 800.2(d)(3), including public involvement requirements of section 106. The information about historic and cultural resources and threatened and endangered species within the area potentially affected by the proposed plan amendment will assist the BLM in identifying and evaluating impacts to such resources.

The BLM will consult with Indian Tribes on a government-to-government basis in accordance with Executive Order 13175, BLM MS 1780, and other Departmental policies. Tribal concerns, including impacts on Indian trust assets and potential impacts to cultural resources, will be given due consideration. Federal, State, and local agencies, along with Indian Tribes and other stakeholders that may be interested in or affected by the proposed Dodge Flat II Solar Energy Center project that the BLM is evaluating, are invited to participate in the scoping process and, if eligible, may request or be requested by the BLM to participate

in the development of the environmental analysis as a cooperating agency.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

(Authority: 40 CFR 1501.7 and 43 CFR 1610.2)

Jon K. Raby,
State Director.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[BLM_HQ_FRN_MO4500177363]

Notice of Availability of the Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement for Utility-Scale Solar Energy Development and Notice of Public Meetings

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: In compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended (NEPA), and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended (FLPMA), the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared a Draft Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for Utility-scale Solar Energy Development and associated Resource Management Plan (RMP) Amendments and by this notice is providing information announcing the opening of the comment period on the Draft Programmatic EIS.

DATES: This notice announces the opening of a 90-day comment period for the Draft Programmatic EIS beginning with the date following the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) publication of its Notice of Availability (NOA) in the **Federal Register**.

To afford the BLM the opportunity to consider comments in the course of preparing the Proposed RMP Amendments/Final Programmatic EIS, please ensure your comments are received prior to the close of the 90-day

comment period or 15 days after the last public meeting, whichever is later.

The BLM will hold two virtual and six in-person public meetings during the comment period. Public meetings will commence on February 5, 2024, with the first being a virtual meeting. In-person public meetings will be held in the following cities:

- Boise, Idaho;
- Cedar City, Utah;
- Las Vegas, Nevada;
- Yuma, Arizona;
- Grand Junction, Colorado; and
- Albuquerque, New Mexico.

Additional information for all public meetings is available at the project website listed in the addresses section below.

ADDRESSES: The Draft Programmatic EIS is available for review on the BLM ePlanning project website at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510>.

Written comments related to the Draft Programmatic EIS may be submitted by any of the following methods:

- *Website:* <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2022371/510>.
- *Email:* solar@blm.gov.
- *Mail:* BLM, Attn: Draft Solar EIS, 1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT:

Jeremy Bluma, Senior Advisor, National Renewable Energy Coordination Office, BLM Headquarters, email: jbluma@blm.gov or telephone: (208) 789-6014. Individuals in the United States who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability may dial 711 (TTY, TDD, or TeleBraille) to access telecommunications relay services for contacting Mr. Bluma. Individuals outside the United States should use the relay services offered within their country to make international calls to the point of contact in the United States.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: This document provides notice that the BLM has prepared, in collaboration with Cooperating Agencies, a Draft Programmatic EIS and is announcing the opening of the comment period. The Final Programmatic EIS may support a series of RMP amendments following its completion. The Draft Programmatic EIS identifies the land use plans that may be amended.

The planning area is located within the 11 States of Arizona, California (excluding the lands covered by the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan in seven southern California counties), Colorado, Idaho, Montana, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon, Utah, Washington, and Wyoming and

encompasses approximately 162 million acres of BLM-administered public land.

The BLM is undertaking this programmatic evaluation to assess the potential environmental, cultural, and economic impacts of modifying its current solar energy program across the 11 Western States. Potential modifications, through land use plan amendments, are being considered to improve management consistency regarding utility-scale solar energy development, advance national renewable energy development priorities and goals, and address changes in solar technologies that have occurred since the BLM's last solar energy planning effort in 2012. Potential land use plan amendments would align with the principles of multiple use and sustained yield, consistent with FLPMA. Under FLPMA, the BLM strives to make land use decisions that meet the Nation's many needs, are environmentally responsible, and take into account the use and enjoyment of the public lands by present and future generations. The BLM seeks to advance its solar energy program consistent with balanced management for other important land uses such as recreational use; agricultural use, such as grazing; other energy and mineral development; resource protection, including National Monuments and National Conservation Areas; wilderness areas and wilderness study areas; other specially designated areas; wildlife and big game; water resources; cultural, historical, and paleontological resources; and restoration of lands and resources where appropriate.

Purpose and Need

The purpose of the proposed action is to facilitate improved siting of utility-scale solar energy development by identifying areas of BLM-administered lands where solar energy development proposals may encounter fewer resource conflicts as "solar application areas" and identifying areas of public lands with known high potential for resource conflicts as "exclusion areas." There is a need to improve the solar development application process by providing development opportunities in specified "solar application areas" while maintaining sufficient flexibility to account for site-specific resource considerations on a case-by-case basis as part of subsequent project-specific decisions. Although additional site-specific environmental analysis under NEPA will be needed to support project-level decisions to authorize utility-scale solar energy development, this macro-scale programmatic land use planning effort will provide a framework for

making those decisions in a systematic and consistent way. Applications processed under this framework are expected to have a higher likelihood of alignment with the BLM's multiple use and sustained yield mission than under current land use plans, leading to more expedient processing without jeopardizing critical resources or other uses of public lands.

This programmatic planning effort also responds to changes that have occurred since the BLM's last programmatic solar development planning effort. First, utility-scale solar energy development on and off public lands has significantly increased and is expected to continue to increase in view of a growing public interest in carbon pollution-free energy generation. Second, due to technological advancements and economic forces affecting power markets, the composition of proposed solar energy generation projects is now different, with one example being a focus by solar developers in the United States on using photovoltaic technology rather than solar thermal facilities. Third, due to some of the technological advancements mentioned above, the BLM is receiving increased interest in utility-scale solar energy development on public lands at more northern latitudes.

In response to these changes, the BLM needs to update its administration of the public lands to facilitate responsible siting of solar energy development. The BLM seeks to accomplish this by amending its land use plans in the 11 Western States to identify areas more suitable for solar development while appropriately excluding solar energy development applications from areas where protection is warranted based on critical need(s). Potential land use plan amendments may also involve updating design features and environmental evaluation processes and incorporating new information and additional environmental analysis.

Alternatives Including the Preferred Alternative

The BLM has analyzed six alternatives in detail, including the no action alternative. Each alternative makes available varying amounts of public lands for solar development applications. In descending order from the most available public lands for solar development application, Alternative 1 would make available approximately 55 million acres; the No Action Alternative would maintain the availability of approximately 47 million acres; Alternative 2 would make available approximately 36 million acres; Alternative 3 would make available

approximately 22 million acres; Alternative 4 would make available approximately 11 million acres; and Alternative 5 would make available approximately 8 million acres. The BLM considered six additional alternatives but did not carry those alternatives forward for detailed analysis for the reasons discussed in the Draft Programmatic EIS.

A reasonably foreseeable development scenario (RFDS) was developed as part of the Draft Programmatic EIS to help define the potential magnitude of solar energy development that could occur within the 11-State study area by 2045. Based on the RFDS, the estimated demand for solar energy generation on public lands by 2045 will be approximately 93,000 megawatts, which would require making approximately 700,000 acres of public land available for utility-scale solar development.

The BLM has identified Alternative 3 as the preferred alternative in the Draft Programmatic EIS. Alternative 3 would make public lands within 10 miles of existing and planned transmission lines over 100 kilovolts available for solar applications unless otherwise excluded based on the resource-based exclusion criteria identified in the EIS. Alternative 3 would improve the solar development application process by excluding solar energy development applications from areas where protection is warranted and providing development siting opportunities in specified "solar application areas" while maintaining sufficient siting flexibility to account for site-specific resource considerations on a case-by-case basis under subsequent project-specific decisions.

Mitigation

Mitigation under the Programmatic EIS would generally take the form of avoidance and minimization. Avoidance would be achieved by excluding certain areas of public lands from solar energy development applications, depending on the alternative, based on defined criteria. Minimization would be achieved by requiring that various programmatic design features be incorporated into solar development proposals. Additional mitigation, including further avoidance, minimization, and compensation, may be required and incorporated into a solar development proposal at the project approval stage.

Schedule for the Decision-Making Process

The BLM will provide this and additional opportunities for public participation consistent with NEPA and land use planning processes, including

a 30-day public protest period and a 60-day Governor's consistency review on the Final Programmatic EIS and Proposed RMP Amendments. The Proposed RMP Amendments/Final Programmatic EIS is anticipated to be available for public protest in August 2024.

The BLM will continue to consult with Indian Tribal Nations on a government-to-government basis in accordance with Executive Order 13175, BLM MS 1780, and other Departmental policies. Tribal concerns, including impacts on Indian trust assets and potential impacts to cultural resources, will be given due consideration. Consultation will continue on an individual basis with interested Tribes.

Comments on the Draft Programmatic EIS would be most helpful if provided at a level similar to that of master planning and zoning and with a focus on where solar development on public lands is most appropriate and where it should be disallowed and precluded from consideration. Comments about suggested design features that may be appropriate for the BLM to require are also encouraged.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment—including your personal identifying information—may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

(Authority: 40 CFR 1506.6, 40 CFR 1506.10, 43 CFR 1610.2)

Benjamin E. Gruber,

Acting Assistant Director, Energy, Minerals, and Realty Management.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

[BLM_CO_FRN_MO4500176823]

Notice of Availability of the Record of Decision for the Approved Eastern Colorado Resource Management Plan for the Royal Gorge Field Office, Colorado

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announces the

availability of the Record of Decision (ROD) for the approved Resource Management Plan (RMP) for the Royal Gorge Field Office located in eastern Colorado. The Colorado State Director signed the ROD on January 9, 2024, which constitutes the final decision of the BLM and makes the approved RMP effective immediately.

DATES: The Colorado State Director signed the ROD on January 9, 2024.

ADDRESSES: The ROD/approved RMP is available online at <https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/39877/510>. Printed copies of the ROD/approved RMP are available for public inspection at Royal Gorge Field Office, Bureau of Land Management, 3028 E. Main, Cañon City, CO 81212 or can be provided upon request by contacting BLM Project Manager John Smeins at jsmeins@blm.gov or 719-252-8212.

A copy of the Protest Resolution Report is available at: <https://www.blm.gov/programs/planning-and-nepa/public-participation/protest-resolution-reports>.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: John Smeins, Project Manager, telephone 719-252-8212; address 3028 E Main St., Cañon City, CO 81212; email jsmeins@blm.gov. Individuals in the United States who are deaf, deafblind, hard of hearing, or have a speech disability may dial 711 (TTY, TDD, or TeleBraille) to access telecommunications relay services for contacting Mr. Smeins. Individuals outside the United States should use the relay services offered within their country to make international calls to the point-of-contact in the United States.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The BLM prepared the Eastern Colorado proposed RMP/final environmental impact statement (EIS) to evaluate and revise the management strategy for resources, resource uses, and special designations on public lands managed by the Royal Gorge Field Office, which is the planning area for the RMP. Existing management decisions for public lands and resources in the Royal Gorge Field Office are currently described in two documents: the 1986 Northeast RMP, as amended; and the 1996 Royal Gorge RMP, as amended.

The planning area encompasses approximately 35 million acres of land under various jurisdictions, including the BLM, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service, State of Colorado, and local government, and private lands in 37 counties across south-central and eastern Colorado. The Browns Canyon National Monument is not part of the planning area for this RMP/EIS, as it is