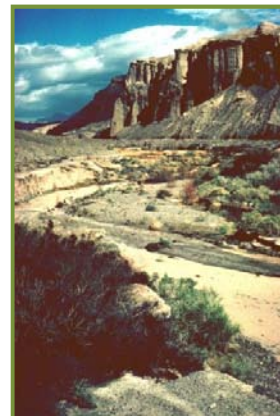




Siting Renewable Energy Projects in the Right Places

Introduction

To reach an 80 percent reduction in greenhouse gas emissions by 2050, and avoid the worst effects of climate change, we will need to maximize the enormous renewable energy potential in the U.S. Our public lands can help us reach this goal. But because of the size and nature of many large-scale renewable energy projects, care must be taken to ensure that the places chosen for development will result in the least impact to wild places, important habitat, ecosystems, cultural and historic resources, and the environment. By working together and facilitating a thoughtful program for development that includes meaningful stakeholder participation, we can achieve our climate goals and preserve and protect our public lands for future generations.



*California Desert District
Source: BLM*

Finding the Best Sites

Finding the best sites begins with a transparent administrative process. A meaningful siting program is critical to engage interested stakeholders and ensure that the development of renewable energy resources on the public lands is sustainable. Solar and wind energy projects are built to last for 50 years or more, and consequentially will displace many if not all of the other potential utilizations of public lands. And the footprint of the project is only the beginning – all projects need associated transmission to bring the power they generate to the communities that will be served by these facilities. A systematic administrative process is the most judicious way to prevent energy sprawl while ensuring that new renewable energy projects are developed in concert with long-term transmission and utility planning efforts.

Fundamental to such a process are early and clear delineations that dictate suitable and unsuitable places for development. In coordination with a number of stakeholder interests, including representatives from the renewable energy industry along with a number of key state governments, our collective organizations have developed screening processes and criteria intended to guide solar and wind development to areas with comparatively low potential for conflict and controversy.

By front loading the process and establishing key areas where NOT to develop, a process is established that provides the necessary certainty that renewable developers need while also protecting the most sensitive landscapes and wildlands.

In an effort to flag areas that will generate significant controversy the environmental community has developed the following list of criteria for areas to avoid in siting renewable projects. The criteria are not intended to serve as a substitute for project specific review. They do not include the categories of lands within the Department of Interior that are already off limits to all development by statute or policy.

- Proposed Wilderness Areas, proposed National Monuments, and Citizens' Wilderness Inventory Areas.
- Locations that support sensitive biological resources, including: federally designated and proposed critical habitat; significant populations of federal or state threatened and endangered species, significant populations of sensitive, rare and special status species, and rare or unique plant communities.
- Lands purchased for conservation including those conveyed to the federal government
- Landscape-level biological linkage areas required for the continued functioning of biological and ecological processes.
- National Historic Register eligible sites and other known cultural resources.
- Locations directly adjacent to National or State Park units.



Wind turbines
Source: BPA

We believe that adoption of criteria as recommended is absolutely critical to ensure that sensitive and iconic landscapes and habitats are safeguarded while also facilitating development of renewable resources. In essence, the right administrative process directs development away from unsuitable lands, while suitable lands can receive further screening to ensure that unavoidable impacts derived from development are prescribed and mitigated for in the long-term.