



# **Trump Admin Will Approve Massive Alternative Energy Projects For Federal Land**

Since President Trump has put the brakes on climate change policies, it is incongruous that the administration will now approve massive alternative energy projects on public lands, all of which will involve Public-Private-Partnerships. □ TN Editor

The Trump administration is poised this year to do what congressional Democrats and other critics of the president's "energy dominance" campaign have been demanding for months: advance large-scale renewable energy projects on federal lands.

By summer, the Bureau of Land Management plans to have issued records of decision (RODs) approving five commercial-scale solar and wind projects, as well as a major proposal to open 21,000 acres in Southern California for geothermal energy leasing, according to a BLM state-by-state priority project list obtained by E&E News.

To be sure, the priority list includes plenty of high-profile fossil fuel and mining projects, including issuing an ROD by April for a revised management plan that could open up sensitive wildlife habitat within the

National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska to oil drilling.

But the priority list under President Trump also includes target dates to issue final approvals for:

- The Gemini Solar Project in Nevada, which would have the capacity to produce 690 megawatts of electricity, ranking it among the world's largest photovoltaic power plants. Projected to sit on roughly 7,100 acres of BLM-managed lands about 33 miles northeast of Las Vegas, the project also includes a large solar storage capacity that would allow it to feed power to the energy grid after sundown. BLM in December published a final environmental impact statement (EIS) and proposed resource management plan amendment for the project in the *Federal Register*, kicking off a 30-day public protest period running through Jan. 27.
- The Crimson Solar Project in California, which would have a capacity to produce 350 MW of electricity, or enough to power more than 100,000 homes. Proposed to be built on about 2,700 acres of federal lands in Riverside County, it also is projected to include a battery storage component allowing it to supply power after the sun goes down. It's set for an ROD as early as February.
- The Haiwee Geothermal Leasing Area, which would offer more than 21,000 acres in California for utility-scale geothermal power development. BLM has estimated that the proposed leasing area could spur \$1 billion in investment in geothermal power projects capable of producing enough electricity to power about 117,000 homes. An ROD is expected in February.
- The Walker Ridge Wind Energy Project in Northern California, which would string together about 42 wind turbines across 2,270 acres of federal lands and have the capacity to power about 145,000 homes. BLM is expected to approve the project by June.
- The Borderlands Wind Project in New Mexico. The project in Catron County would have a capacity to produce up to 100 MW of electricity. The priority list forecasts issuing a final EIS for the project in March and an ROD approving it in July.
- The Yellow Pine Solar Project in Nevada, which would have the

capacity to produce up to 250 MW of electricity. It's proposed to be built on roughly 9,000 acres of federal lands about 32 miles west of Las Vegas, and BLM withdrew the area from new mining claims for as long as two years while it conducts an EIS of the proposal. Yellow Pine is not as far along in the federal review process as the other projects on the list. A draft EIS is expected in January, followed by a final EIS in May. The project list forecasts issuing an ROD in July.

The projected approval dates come as conservation groups and congressional Democrats have criticized Trump's focus on oil and gas drilling and mining on federal lands.

To date, BLM under Trump has approved only two solar power projects on federal lands, and no wind or geothermal projects.

BLM, as it has done for months, insists that solar, wind and geothermal energy have always been a part of the administration's "all-of-the-above energy approach," though the bureau added in an emailed statement that what projects get done are "subject to free markets."

"The number of pending proposals for any type of energy development, including renewables, is driven by the number of applications we receive — which in turn is driven by market forces beyond our control," the statement says.

## **BLM 'caught in their own little box'**

The list of renewable energy projects set for approval, though unusual, does not point to a sudden change of heart in the Trump administration's views of renewable energy, said Scott Sklar, director of the George Washington University Solar Institute in Washington.

Rather, Sklar suggested the administration doesn't have any choice but to make at least some effort to advance renewable energy projects, especially solar, now that "the industry is starting to get up to scale."

If the Trump administration is going to conduct an American "energy dominance" campaign, he said, it can't push to increase offshore oil

production, for example, and not support offshore wind energy.

“Not that it’s in their hearts, but they can’t deny it,” he said of renewables’ place in the energy market.

“They’ve supported oil and gas development on federal lands, so why would you not support renewable energy? In the end, they’re caught in their own little box,” he said.

He added, “They are just sort of stuck, even though they probably wish [renewable energy] would just go away.”

The administration’s motivation is less important to congressional Democrats than the fact that solar, wind and geothermal power project applications are being processed.

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