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Secretary Salazar Finalizes Plan to Establish Renewable Energy Zone on Public Lands in Arizona

*First-ever state-wide plan to identify, set aside previously disturbed
lands to encourage wind and solar energy development*

WASHINGTON, DC -- Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today announced that Interior has designated 192,100 acres of public land across Arizona as potentially suitable for utility-scale solar and wind energy development, furthering President Obama's 'all-of-the-above' strategy to expand domestic energy production.

The publication of the Record of Decision (ROD) for this initiative, known as the Restoration Design Energy Project, caps a three-year, statewide environmental analysis of disturbed land and other areas with few known resource conflicts that could accommodate commercial renewable energy projects.

The ROD also establishes the Agua Caliente Solar Energy Zone, the third solar zone on public lands in Arizona and the 18th nationwide. The [Solar Energy Zones](#) are part of the Obama Administration's efforts to facilitate solar energy development by identifying areas in six states in the West with high solar potential, few resource conflicts and access to existing or planned transmission. With the Agua Caliente zone, Interior is delivering on the promise made as part of the Western Solar Plan to identify and establish additional solar energy zones.

"This project is a key milestone in our work to spur smart development of solar and wind energy on public lands across the West," Secretary Salazar said. "Arizona has huge potential when it comes to building a clean energy economy, and this landscape-level plan lays a solid foundation for making sure that it happens in the right way and in the right places. As we advance the President's energy strategy, we continue to work closely with states, local communities, tribes, industry, conservation and other groups to reduce potential resource conflicts and expedite

appropriate projects that will generate jobs and investment in rural communities.”

Since 2009, the Obama Administration has approved 34 renewable energy proposals for public lands, including solar, wind and geothermal projects. Together, they could generate 10,400 megawatts of electricity, or enough energy to power more than 3 million homes.

The lands identified in Arizona today include previously disturbed sites (primarily former agricultural areas) and lands with low resource sensitivity and few environmental conflicts. Bureau of Land Management lands in Arizona containing sensitive resources requiring protection, such as endangered or threatened wildlife and sites of cultural and historic importance, were eliminated from consideration. Additionally, the areas selected had to have reasonable access to transmission lines and load centers as well as be situated near areas with high electricity demand.

The ROD also sets standards for projects to avoid impacts to sensitive watersheds, ground water supplies and water quality and establishes a baseline set of environmental protection measures for proposed renewable energy projects. Today’s action does not directly authorize any solar or wind energy projects; any proposal will need to undergo a site-specific environmental review.

“This initiative exemplifies our ‘Smart-from-the-Start’ review process, which puts appropriate pieces in place for responsibly developing renewable energy projects on public lands,” said Mike Pool, acting BLM Director. “The Arizona project can really serve as a model for future statewide analyses for responsible energy development in the West.”

The new 2,550-acre Agua Caliente Solar Energy Zone is located in Yuma County near Dateland, and the BLM estimates that the zone could generate more than 20 megawatts through utility-scale solar projects. The BLM administers about 12.2 million surface acres of public lands in Arizona.

To implement the ROD, eight BLM resource management plans will be amended to identify Renewable Energy Development Areas and provide guidance on how public lands are to be used. These identified areas are within 5 miles of a transmission line or a designated transmission corridor, and are close to cities, towns, or industrial centers.

For more information on today’s announcement, including maps, a fact sheet and the ROD, please visit http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/energy/arra_solar.html.