350 megawatt photovoltaic facility in Nevada will benefit Moapa Band of Paiute Indians, generate enough power for over 100,000 homes

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WASHINGTON – As part of the Obama Administration's all of the above approach to American energy, Secretary of the Interior Ken Salazar today approved a 350-megawatt solar energy project on tribal trust land of the Moapa Band of Paiute Indians (Tribe) in Clark County, Nevada. The project marks a milestone as the first-ever, utility-scale solar project approved for development on tribal lands, and is one of the many steps the administration has taken to help strengthen tribal communities.

The project is also the 31st utility-scale renewable energy project that Interior has approved since 2009 as part of a Department-wide effort to advance smart development of renewable energy on our nation's public lands. Prior to 2009, there were no solar energy projects permitted on public lands; today's approval brings the total to 17 solar projects, 6 wind farms, and 8 geothermal plants. If built by the companies, the renewable energy projects approved by this administration will provide approximately 7,200 megawatts of power to communities across the West, or enough to power nearly 2.5 million homes. These achievements build on the historic expansion of renewable energy under President Obama, with energy from sources like wind and solar doubling since the President took office.

"This trailblazing project is part of the President's commitment to help build strong, sustainable tribal communities by supporting safe and responsible renewable energy development," Secretary Salazar said. "Tribal lands hold great renewable energy potential, and smart development of these resources has the power to strengthen tribal economies, create jobs and generate clean electricity for communities across Indian Country."

The Record of Decision signed today approves the construction, operation and maintenance of a low-impact photovoltaic (PV) facility and associated infrastructure on about 2,000 acres of the Tribe's reservation, located 30 miles north of Las Vegas. The site represents about three percent of the Tribe's 71,954-acres, which are held in trust by the U.S. Government. The project is expected to generate about 400 jobs at peak construction and 15-20 permanent jobs.

"This is a great day for the Moapa Band of Paiute Indians, and for Indian Country as a whole," said Donald "Del" Laverdure, Acting Assistant Secretary of Indian Affairs. "As our nation's energy portfolio continues to grow, it is important that tribal communities have the opportunity to harness the energy of the wind and sun in a way that can power our homes, businesses and economies. Today is a important step in that direction."

The solar project approved today builds on President Obama's strong record of supporting rural economies through the White House Rural Council. Established one year ago, the Rural Council has focused on maximizing the impact of Federal investment to promote economic prosperity and improve

the quality of life in rural communities, including on tribal lands.

Proposed by K Road Moapa Solar LLC, the project would be built in three phases of 100-150 megawatts. In addition to PV panel arrays, major project components include a 500-kilovolt transmission line to deliver power to the grid and a 12- kilovolt transmission line to the existing Moapa Travel Plaza after Phase 1 is complete. About 12 acres of U.S. public land administered by the Bureau of Land Management would be required for the 500-kv transmission line.

The project will generate lease income for the tribe, create new jobs and employment opportunities for tribal members, and connect the existing tribally-owned Travel Plaza to the electrical grid, decreasing its dependence on a diesel-powered generator. The procurement of construction materials and equipment is expected to generate additional sales and use tax revenues for the county and the state.

In evaluating the proposed project's compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act, the Bureau of Indian Affairs, as the lead federal agency, worked closely with cooperating agencies, including the Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Moapa Band.

To minimize and mitigate potential environmental impacts, a Desert Tortoise Translocation Plan, Bird and Bat Conservation Strategy and Weed Management Plan will be implemented, and natural resources monitoring by qualified biologists will be conducted during all surface disturbing activities. Tortoises found within the project boundary would be relocated within the reservation in accordance with U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service protocols. No water will be used in the production of electricity, but will be used periodically for cleaning the photovoltaic panels.

Under the Obama Administration's initiatives to foster tribal energy self-sufficiency and advance economic competitiveness, Interior is also engaged in a sweeping reform of federal surface leasing regulations for American Indian lands that will streamline the approval process for home ownership and spur renewable energy development in Indian Country. As trustee for the land and resources of federally-recognized tribes, Interior is responsible for managing about 55 million surface acres in Indian Country.

A fact sheet on the Moapa Project is available here. A map of the project area is here.