

BLM Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (SPEIS)

Updated Western Solar Plan

Background

The Energy Act of 2020 calls on the Secretary of the Department of Interior to support national renewable energy goals on public lands including the goal seeking to permit at least 25 GW of electricity from wind, solar and geothermal projects by 2025. The goal of BLM SPEIS is to update the 2012 Western Solar Plan, BLM's framework for siting solar energy projects. Whereas the 2012 Western Solar Plan applied to Arizona, California, Colorado, Nevada, New Mexico, and Utah; the updated plan would expand the BLM's solar energy planning to include Idaho, Montana, Oregon, Washington, and Wyoming.

Challenge

For New Mexico, the SPEIS proposes approximately 3 million acres for available solar application. Much of this area is embedded within Pueblo and Tribal cultural landscapes. New Mexico's resource management plans being considered in the SPEIS include:

- Carlsbad RMP
- El Malpais RMP
- Farmington RMP
- Kasha-Katuwe Tent Rocks NM RMP
- Mimbres RMP
- Prehistoric Trackways NM RMP
- Rio Puerco RMP
- Roswell RMP
- Socorro RMP
- Taos RMP
- White Sands RMP

Please contact Sovereign Energy if you would like Tribal-specific recommendations on action items and next steps for this project or if your Tribe has any questions about federal energy-related projects impacting traditional cultural landscapes or Tribal interests.

BLM SPEIS

The BLM SPEIS is an assessment of the environmental, cultural, and economic impacts of PV utility-scale solar energy developments, as well as the impacts of supporting facilities and transmission connections. The BLM SPEIS aims to:

- Identify areas most appropriate for solar energy development and expand the number of acres prioritized for solar development
- Identify Exclusion Areas where solar activity should be off-limits and update exclusion criteria
- Streamline solar permitting processes without sacrificing community input and steamrolling environmental concerns
- Promote and facilitate responsible solar development in priority areas

The BLM SPEIS has five Action Alternatives that would each amend resource management plans to identify public lands available for and public lands excluded from solar development in all 11-states.

NEPA Process

The project began in December 2022 and scoping took place early 2023. The draft BLM SPEIS is open for public comment through April 18th, 2024. The preferred alternative proposes 22 million acres of public land for solar projects in the western US.

NHPA Section 106

In December 2022, 241 Tribes were sent Tribal consultation letters. BLM will exclude areas from availability according to Tribal-specific criteria and areas identified through tribal consultation.