

U.S. Bureau of Land Management Restoration Design Energy Project Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The Essentials

- The BLM proposes to support renewable energy development while also protecting and restoring landscapes in Arizona through its Restoration Design Energy Project (RDEP).
- The RDEP will streamline part of the initial process for renewable energy development on public lands by vetting the areas before renewable energy developers submit proposals.
- In the BLM's draft environmental impact statement (DEIS), the BLM identified and analyzed six Alternatives plus the required No Action Alternative.
- The BLM's preferred alternative is Alternative 6 Collaborative-based Renewable Energy Development Areas (REDA) and the Agua Caliente Solar Energy Zone (SEZ). Alt. 6 allows for 237,100 acres for REDAs and 6,770 acres for SEZ.
- The public comment period on the DEIS ends May 17, 2012.

Details of the policy

The goals of the Restoration Design Energy Project (RDEP) are to 1) identify BLM-managed lands that meet technical requirements for renewable energy development that are also previously disturbed lands or have minimal likelihood of environmental and cultural conflicts; 2) draft management actions, design features, land tenure and reuse policies for eventual renewable energy development projects.

The overarching purpose of RDEP draft environmental impact statement (DEIS) is to provide "the BLM, the State of Arizona, county and local governments, tribal governments, utility companies, the renewable energy industry, and the public with a better understanding of the environmental and economic issues associated with developing renewable energy in Arizona." By going through the RDEP process, the BLM will streamline part of the initial process for renewable energy development on public lands by vetting the areas before developers submit proposals. The BLM establishes the final REDAs, the BLM will continue to review and authorize individual proposals for renewable energy development on a case-by-case basis.

The DEIS also includes statewide analysis of potential renewable energy development on non-BLM managed lands throughout Arizona. The BLM anticipates partnering with other federal and state agencies and private landowners for eventual development of renewable energy projects on non-BLM managed land analyzed in the RDEP draft and final environmental impact statements.

Summaries of Alternatives considered in the DEIS

No Action Alternative. Required in all environmental impact statements. Here, No Action would mean that all renewable energy development proposals on BLM-managed land in Arizona would be subject to the current BLM analysis and Right-of-Way (ROW) and land disposal granting processes. This alternative also does not include the Agua Caliente SEZ.

Alt. 1: Maximum REDA with no issue-specific limits. Eliminates from consideration all areas with known sensitive resources, thus focusing the RDEP on areas with a higher likelihood of fewer conflicts and greater flexibility for small and large-scale renewable energy developments. Identifies 321,500 possible REDA acres and 20,600 possible SEZ acres.

Alt. 2: Transmission Line and Utility Corridor REDA. Focuses only on areas with access to existing transmission lines or currently designated utility corridors. Alt. 2 narrows the maximum REDA (identified in Alt. 1) to only include lands within 5 miles of existing or planned transmission line. Identifies 218,600 possible REDA acres and 6,770 possible SEZ acres.

Alt. 3: Load Offset REDA. Focuses on areas near points of high demand like cities to help Arizona meet its Renewable Energy Standard. Alt. 3 uses existing transmission and reduces the load required from larger grid. It promotes development near Palo Verde Nuclear Power Plant and the town of Gila Bend. Identifies 129,800 possible REDA acres and 2,760 possible SEZ acres.

Alt. 4: Water Conservation and Protection REDA. Narrows the max REDA by overlaying water protection zones to protect water in areas with known water supply issues. Identifies 321,500 possible REDA acres and 20,600 possible SEZ acres.

Alt. 5: Land-Tenure REDA. Focuses on lands currently designated as suitable for disposal due to: low resource value, previously disturbed, and isolated from large blocks of public land. Identifies 43,700 possible REDA acres and 0 possible SEZ acres.

Alt. 6: Collaborative-based REDA and Agua Caliente SEZ. Combines all the above overlay issues (Pinpointed in Alts 2-5) while eliminating the problem acreages identified in Alts 2-5. The public, cooperating agencies, and other stakeholders have provided input on this alternative prior to the DEIS publication. Identifies 237,100 possible REDA acres and 6,770 possible SEZ acres.



Alternative 6: Collaborative-Based REDA on BLM-Administered Lands



Alternative 6 includes REDA within 5 miles of existing or certified transmission lines, either side of the outer boundary of designated Arizona BLM Utility Corridors, designated BLM West Wide Energy Corridors, and US Bureau of Reclamation Central Arizona Project right-of-way and irrigation pumping sites. Additionally, Alternative 6 includes REDA within 10 miles of Arizona incorporated cities and within 20 miles of Palo Verde Nuclear Power Plant and the town of Gila Bend. Alternative 6 also categorizes REDA into Water Protection Zones 1, 2, or 3 with Zone 1 affording the least protection and Zone 3 the highest.

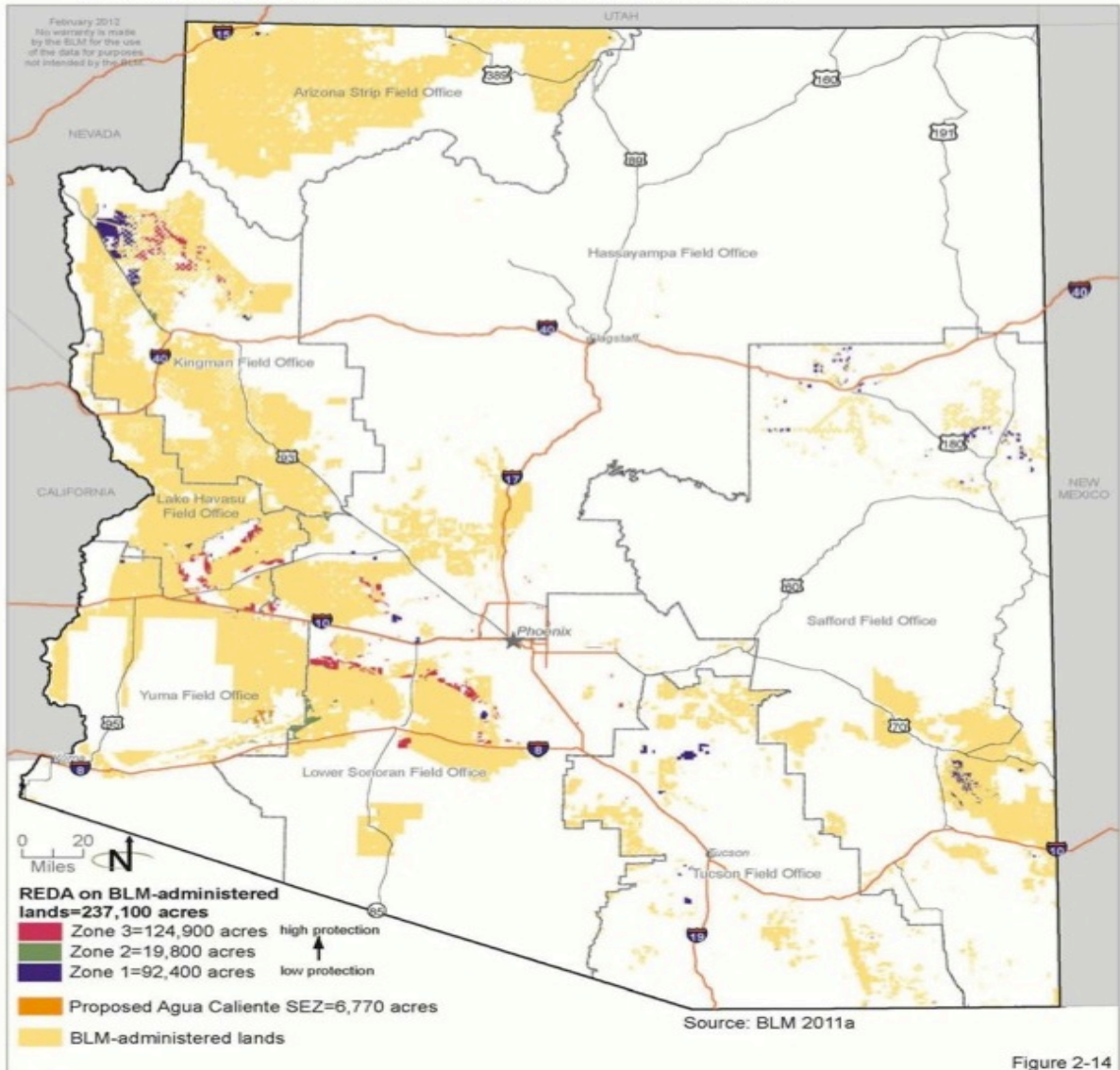


Figure 2-14

Map of acreages identified in the Preferred Alternative 6: Collaborative-Based REDA

How is this different from the BLM's Solar SEZ proposal?

The RDEP is closely coordinated with the Solar PEIS, but it is Arizona-specific while the Solar PEIS covers Arizona and five other western states. The RDEP will refine and build upon the policies outlined in the Solar PEIS.

**Table ES-1
Comparison of the Scope of the Solar PEIS and the RDEP**

Solar PEIS	RDEP¹
Applies to: Utility-scale solar energy developments (≥20 MW) ONLY	Applies to: Solar-based energy technologies and wind energy technologies
<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Allocations:<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Exclusion Areas- Variance Areas (Variance Process required)- SEZs – two in Arizona:<ul style="list-style-type: none">▪ Brenda▪ Gillespie• Solar Energy Development Program Policies & Procedures• Solar Energy Development Program Design Features	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Identify REDAs within Variance Areas• Identify the Agua Caliente SEZ• Wind Energy Program policies and procedures from the Wind Energy Program ROD• Goals, Management Actions, and Design Features for solar and wind renewable energy development regardless of scale, land reuse, and remediation of disturbed sites

Source: BLM's DEIS for the Restoration Design Energy Project Executive Summary p. ES-4

Read more

Link to the BLM's Draft Environmental Impact Statement

http://www.blm.gov/az/st/en/prog/energy/arra_solar/DEIS.html

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Latest developments

Draft Environmental Impact Statement issued February 17, 2012.

60-day comment period lasts until May 17, 2012.

Public Hearings coming up:

April 10, 2012: Yuma Civic and Convention Center, 1440 Desert Hill Dr., Yuma, AZ from 6:30-8:30 PM

April 11, 2012: Holiday Inn, 4550 S. Palo Verde Rd, Tucson, AZ from 6:30-8:30 PM