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# Barstow area sees influx of renewable energy applications

**Abby Sewell, Staff Writer**

March 10, 2009

BARSTOW • With interest in wind and solar energy rising, the public lands surrounding Barstow appear likely to become a major player in renewable energy production.

As of February, applications for wind and solar projects in the Barstow Field Office area of the Bureau of Land Management made up about 27 percent of applications pending statewide.

The Barstow Field Office covers about 3.2 million acres within the BLM's California Desert District, Barstow Field Manager Roxie Trost said. As well as Barstow, it includes the Victor Valley and Twentynine Palms area and extends north to the Nevada state line. While the project applications are scattered throughout that area, there are clusters in the area immediately surrounding Barstow and along Interstate 40 to the east.

The wind applications started rolling in about four years ago, and the solar applications came slightly later, Trost said. She attributed the increased interest to both federal and state actions, including an executive order signed by Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger that sets a target of producing 33 percent of the state's energy through renewable power by 2020.

None of the project applications in the Barstow area have been completely processed yet, and most have not even begun the approximately two-year process of preparing an environmental impact statement, Trost said. Before they get to that point, applicants must do feasibility studies, surveys of cultural resources and endangered species, and complete a plan of development.

Mickey Quillman, resources branch chief with the Barstow BLM office, said the priority application currently is a 914 megawatt solar plant proposed by Stirling Energy Systems, Inc., which would sit on about 6,779 acres west of Ludlow along Interstate 40. Within the next few months, the BLM expects to publish a notice of intent to prepare an environmental impact statement for the project.

The city of Barstow is looking at the possible influx of renewable energy projects and related jobs as a boost for the local economy, city spokesman John Rader said.

“With virtually unlimited amounts of sun and wind, our area is ground zero for the renewable energy industries,” he said. “We would be foolish to not take advantage of our natural strengths.”

However, the “green” projects bring along their own set of environmental issues, including the fact that solar projects can consume a large amount of water, Quillman said. The environmental review process also looks at the impacts on threatened and endangered species.

David Lamfrom, a field representative with the Barstow office of the National Parks Conservation Association, said the nonprofit environmental group also has concerns about water consumption and potential habitat destruction from renewable energy projects.

Lamfrom said his group would prefer to see projects sited in areas where the habitat has already been disrupted, and as close to population centers, so that desert communities like Barstow can take advantage of the jobs they create.

“We support clean energy, and we support the need for clean energy, but we also want to ensure that the projects are carefully considered,” he said.

Large-scale solar terminals like the proposed Stirling plant must go through a separate environmental review and permitting process with the California Energy Commission as well as the BLM.

Only a few projects have so far reached the stage of applying for certification from the energy commission, said commission spokesman Percy Della. The only one currently under review in San Bernardino County is a proposal for three solar plants near Ivanpah Dry Lake, which lies outside of the Barstow field office area.

Stirling filed an application in December with the energy commission, but it is not yet under review.

### **Applications to the California Bureau of Land Management for wind and solar projects**

All of California

- Wind: 90
- Solar: 74

California Desert District (including Barstow)

- Wind: 61
- Solar: 72

Barstow field office:

- Wind: 25
- Solar: 20

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