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# Renewable Energy and Public Lands

*Key Economic Benefits; Importance of Responsible Development*



Our country's federal public lands—managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) within the Department of the Interior (DOI), have been an important source of energy production for over a century, in addition to providing clean air and water, recreation opportunities and sustaining wildlands and wildlife habitat. Though public lands have huge renewable energy potential, currently less than 5% of the total U.S. solar, wind and geothermal capacity comes from projects on public lands. As our nation's energy needs continue to evolve, investment in responsible renewable energy development can ensure that our public lands are a key part of the clean energy economy and the climate solution. A recent report by The Wilderness Society and the Yale Center for Business and the Environment details key economic benefits and opportunities, as well as the importance of responsible development. The report is available at [www.wilderness.org/renewableenergyreport](http://www.wilderness.org/renewableenergyreport) and <https://cbey.yale.edu/renewable-energy-on-public-lands-report>.

## Key economic benefits of renewable energy

- Provides thousands of jobs
- Renewable energy projects represent billions of dollars in capital investments
- Completed projects provide steady revenue to federal and local governments
- Rural economies dependent on traditional energy sources can benefit from new economic opportunities
- Reduces our dependency on fossil fuels, helping tackle the threat of climate change

## By the numbers (as of 2019)

- 96 utility-scale solar, wind, and geothermal projects operating on public lands
- > 5,000 MW of capacity, powering > 2 million homes
- \$660 million (2019 dollars) to federal, state, and local governments from rents and royalties since 1982
- \$13 billion (2019 dollars) in capital investments for construction of projects since 1996
- > 12,000 construction jobs and > 1,700 operations and maintenance jobs created

## 5 ways to support responsible renewable energy development on public lands.

1. **Fully fund DOI and BLM renewable energy programs.** These programs are critical to ensuring our public lands remain a key part of transitioning to a clean energy future.
2. **Prioritize efficient permitting in the 700,000 acres of lower-impact areas that have already been identified as appropriate for development.** BLM and other federal and state agencies must also coordinate to identify new priority development areas in key states such as Nevada, and pair this work with planning for needed transmission lines. BLM should protect key wildlands and wildlife habitat from development of any kind.
3. **Pass legislation to facilitate responsible renewable energy development and conservation investments, such as the Public Land Renewable Energy Development Act (PLREDA).** If passed, this legislation would promote responsible development of solar, wind, and geothermal energy resources on public lands by directing DOI to identify additional priority development areas in places with high energy potential and lower impacts on wildlife, habitat, and other resources.
4. **Repower old mines and brownfields sites with renewable energy.** By facilitating the redevelopment of old mines, landfills, and other contaminated sites with solar, wind, and geothermal energy, federal and state agencies and Congress can increase renewable energy development while reducing pressure on undeveloped “greenfield” sites.
5. **Take steps to help ensure that the economic benefits of renewable energy development are equitably shared.**

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Renewable energy on public lands is already generating billions of dollars in capital investment; hundreds of millions in federal, state, and local revenue; and thousands of jobs. A smart approach to responsible development can further boost our economy while preserving special places and providing a range of environmental benefits.



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“Uniting people to protect America’s wild places.”