

WBR ARTICLE

BLM to establish renewable energy offices

By Staff

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WASHINGTON D.C. - On his last full day in office, former Secretary of the Interior Dirk Kempthorne issued a secretarial order authorizing the Bureau of Land Management to establish coordination offices to expedite the permitting of wind, solar, biomass and geothermal projects along with needed electrical transmission facilities on BLM-managed lands.

The former secretary's action advanced - slowly - the Interior Department's efforts to achieve a goal set by Congress in the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which called for the development of 10,000 megawatts of non-hydropower renewable energy projects on public lands by 2015.

The to-be-established energy offices, known as Renewable Energy Coordination Offices, will initially be located in those states where the greatest interest has been shown in renewable energy development: Arizona, California, Nevada and Wyoming. The new offices will be staffed BLM employees from a variety of natural resource disciplines, and will also receive staff support from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and other bureaus within the Department of the Interior.

The order authorizes the BLM director to allocate resources that support the processing and permitting of renewable energy projects on public lands; to develop best environmental management practices for these projects; to recover costs in the processing of renewable energy applications; and to improve coordination with other federal agencies, including the Department of Energy and the Environmental Protection Agency, as well as state agencies, to facilitate the processing and permitting of renewable energy projects on public lands.