

Biden-Harris Administration takes major steps to accelerate clean energy geothermal development on public lands

October 18, 2024



The Department of the Interior has announced significant strides in expanding geothermal energy on public lands, an abundant clean energy resource with tremendous potential to help the country meet the Biden-Harris administration’s goal of a carbon pollution-free power sector by 2035.

The Department announced that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has approved the Fervo Cape Geothermal Power Project in Beaver County, Utah, which will use innovative technology to generate up to 2 gigawatts (GW) of baseload power that, if fully developed, is enough to supply over 2 million homes. With this approval, the BLM has now approved nearly 32 gigawatts of clean energy projects on public lands, including 42 projects approved under the Biden-Harris administration. The BLM is also proposing a new categorical exclusion to facilitate geothermal energy resources confirmation on public lands. These actions come as the BLM hosted the biggest geothermal lease sale in more than 15 years.

“Geothermal energy is one of our greatest untapped clean energy resources on public lands,” said **Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary for Land and Minerals Management Dr. Steve Feldgus**. “Today’s actions are part of the Department’s work to deliver on new opportunities, new technologies, and new solutions in geothermal energy that support the Biden-Harris administration’s commitment to create jobs, economic growth, and clean carbon-free electricity for communities throughout the West.”

Replenished by heat sources deep in the Earth, geothermal energy generates electricity with minimal

carbon emissions. It can also be used to heat buildings, operate greenhouses, and support aquaculture operations. Today there are 51 operating power plants producing geothermal energy from BLM-managed public lands. Learn more at the BLM [Geothermal Energy](#) website.

“The BLM is committed to supporting the responsible growth of geothermal energy on public lands,” said **BLM Director Tracy Stone-Manning**. “We need all the tools in the toolbox to reach a clean energy future, and this proposed categorical exclusion will be helpful in accelerating the process of locating new geothermal resources.”

Today’s announcements follow the BLM Nevada State Office’s geothermal lease sale on October 8, which brought in near-record revenues, marking the most successful sale since 2008 and the second-most ever. The BLM sold 64 parcels covering nearly 218,000 acres, bringing in over \$7.8 million in high bids. This marks a sharp increase from the previous year’s sale of 96,600 acres for just over \$1 million, demonstrating the growing interest in geothermal development on public lands.

Fervo Cape Geothermal Power Project

The Fervo Cape Geothermal Power Project is an [enhanced geothermal system](#) that produces energy by injecting water into hot subsurface rock formations and then extracting the heated water to generate electricity, rather than depending on naturally occurring underground hot water like traditional geothermal systems. If fully developed, the project will cover approximately 631 acres, including 148 acres on public lands, and produce up to 2 gigawatts of clean energy. Additional information on the project is available at the [BLM National NEPA Register](#).

Proposed Categorical Exclusion

Today BLM is proposing a new categorical exclusion (CX) that would help accelerate the discovery of new geothermal resources. The CX would apply to geothermal resource confirmation operations plan of up to 20 acres, which can include drilling wells (e.g., core drilling, temperature gradient wells, and/or resource wells) to confirm the existence of a geothermal resource, to improve injection support, or to demonstrate connections between wells. It will be published in the *Federal Register* in the coming days to begin a 30-day public comment period.

Today’s permitting proposal would help accelerate the discovery of new geothermal resources throughout the West, especially in states like Nevada, home to some of the largest undeveloped geothermal potential in the country.

Currently, geothermal developers must conduct two separate environmental reviews: one for initial exploration drilling and another to fully test the geothermal resource, even if both have similar environmental impacts. The proposal would apply only to geothermal resource confirmation operations on public lands and split estates. Further geothermal development would still require additional environmental analysis. Based on [previous DOE analysis](#), these permitting actions could significantly reduce permitting timelines and capital costs of geothermal deployment.

Under the National Environmental Policy Act, categorical exclusions (CXs) are categories of actions that typically do not have significant impacts on the human environment. When used appropriately, CXs

eliminate the need for an environmental assessment (EA) as part of the permitting process. CXs cannot be applied in cases with special circumstances, such as potential impacts to endangered species, in which case an EA must still be conducted.

As of October 2024, the Biden-Harris administration has approved 42 renewable energy projects on public lands (10 solar, 14 geothermal, and 18 gen-ties) and exceeded the goal to permit 25 gigawatts of renewable energy by 2025. In total, the BLM has permitted clean energy projects on public lands with a total capacity of nearly 32 gigawatts of power – enough to power more than 14.5 million homes. This is the latest action as part of the Biden-Harris administration’s effort to improve the federal permitting process and accelerate project reviews.

Image: Fervo Energy