



A 4-Point Plan for Responsibly Expanding Renewable Energy Production on America's Public Lands and Oceans

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Introduction and summary

In less than seven years of the Obama administration, an unprecedented collaboration between private-sector innovators, federal policymakers, and forward-thinking stakeholders has sparked a renewable energy revolution on America's public lands and waters. Whereas coal, oil, gas, and hydropower resources on taxpayer-owned public lands have been the primary focus for both developers and regulators for much of the past century, the Obama administration has, for the first time, facilitated the permitting and construction of large-scale solar, wind, and geothermal projects that are delivering clean, affordable power to American communities.

To help meet rising demand for renewable energy, President Barack Obama's Department of the Interior has permitted more than 50 utility-scale renewable energy projects on public lands since 2009. When fully constructed, these projects will deliver approximately 15,000 megawatts of new, clean renewable energy—enough to power more than 2 million homes.¹ With some of the world's largest solar and wind projects moving forward on public lands, the partnership between the federal government and renewable energy developers has contributed to the nation's twentyfold increase in solar generation and threefold increase in wind generation since 2009.²

With the United States emerging as a global leader in the shift to low-carbon fuel sources, and with projections of rapid growth in renewable energy demand over the next several decades, now is the time to assess how the federal government can build on its successful renewable energy programs on America's public lands. Specifically, how can the Department of the Interior and other federal land management agencies cement recent gains and further accelerate responsible renewable energy development on the nation's public lands and waters?

This report answers that question by identifying the key ingredients that have spurred renewable energy development on public lands since 2009. Building on the administration's record of accomplishment, the Center for American Progress

proposes a four-point plan to accelerate the construction of renewable energy projects on America’s public lands and oceans in the right way and in the right places. Below are the four elements of CAP’s recommended plan of action:

1. **Institutionalize recent renewable energy reforms.** To provide certainty for developers and stakeholders, federal policymakers should institutionalize through legislation and regulation the permitting reforms that have accelerated the review and approval of responsibly sited, large-scale renewable energy projects on public lands and waters.
2. **Designate more renewable energy zones on public lands and waters.** Federal policymakers should identify and use new renewable energy zones to prioritize and incentivize the siting of future projects. Specific initiatives should include: identifying at least 10 new, low-conflict Solar Energy Zones to facilitate the siting of major new solar projects on public lands; expanding offshore wind energy zones to cover deeper waters off the coast of Maine and in the Pacific Ocean to facilitate the deployment of floating turbine technology; and specifying low-conflict wind and geothermal energy zones on public lands throughout the United States.
3. **Develop community-based, distributed renewable energy resources on public lands with interested nearby communities.** Through new partnerships and pilot projects, federal policymakers should work with local communities to site renewable energy projects on adjacent public lands.
4. **Accelerate investment through a new revolving loan fund.** Federal policymakers should establish a revolving loan fund that facilitates the financing of credit-worthy renewable energy projects on public lands and waters that employ proven technologies.

“We have a choice. We can remain the world’s leading importer of oil, or we can become the world’s leading exporter of clean energy. We can hand over the jobs of the future to our competitors, or we can confront what they have already recognized as the great opportunity of our time: The nation that leads the world in creating new sources of clean energy will be the nation that leads the 21st century global economy. That’s the nation I want America to be.”

– President Barack Obama, March 27, 2009³

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As progressives, we believe America should be a land of boundless opportunity, where people can climb the ladder of economic mobility. We believe we owe it to future generations to protect the planet and promote peace and shared global prosperity.

And we believe an effective government can earn the trust of the American people, champion the common good over narrow self-interest, and harness the strength of our diversity.

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