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BLM must act to ensure a bright future for renewable energy on public lands

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There are many pathways toward a cleaner energy future, but any path in the west must at points traverse our public lands. This creates an enormous opportunity for Western states.

Sen. Harry Reid has worked tirelessly to ensure that Nevada is a leader in both solar development and preservation of public lands.

Recently, the Department of the Interior has increased its efforts to encourage clean power on public lands in a responsible way. Last year the Bureau of Land Management proposed a new rule revising the permitting process for projects generating solar and wind energy on public lands.

This modern process has been tested on projects such as Nevada's Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone – and has proven its value to both protect and promote responsible development. It is now time for BLM to finalize that rule and allow it to take effect across the country.

In recent years there has been growing interest in the world-class renewable energy resources found on western public lands. Renewable energy on public lands today looks drastically different from a decade ago or even when President Obama took office in 2009.

Five years ago, no solar projects had been approved or developed on federal land. Today, 34 large-scale solar projects have been approved and some are already producing clean electricity for the nation's use and advancing carbon reduction at a significant scale. Some of these projects are among the largest and technologically advanced in the world. A key to this success has been providing stability and certainty for future energy development.

Finalizing the proposed rule from the BLM will ensure that this stability and certainty exists for all renewable energy projects on public lands.

The first step to securing development is planning that identifies areas with high energy potential and addresses environmental issues early in the process to allow projects to move forward. Nevada's Dry Lake Solar Energy Zone has demonstrated the benefits of the new process. Early investment to identify suitable places for development where environmental conflicts were minimal allowed expedited permitting for projects. Providing these advantages to all clean energy projects on public lands simply makes sense.

Establishing a more efficient and predictable permitting process is another way to add clarity and confidence for developing renewable energy. Fortunately, the proposed rule from BLM is tailored to the unique characteristics and impacts of modern, large-scale renewable energy

projects. This process will establish the stable, predictable policies that businesses and investors need to invest in renewable energy. A number of former western public utility commissioners have signed a letter calling for completion of these guidelines, recognizing that a sound and stable renewable energy program benefits consumers.

Western public lands will be key to unlocking a clean energy future. Establishing the best policies and practices to ensure responsible development now will pay off in the long run – not only for our economy, but for our air, land and water as well. The BLM should finalize its proposed rule, and clear the way for responsible and efficient solar wind development on our public lands.

Timothy Hay is former member of the Nevada Public Utilities Commission and a former Nevada consumer advocate.