

La Paz County Solar Energy and Job Creation Act

The La Paz County Solar Energy and Job Creation Act would convey 4,800 acres of BLM land to La Paz County for fair market value. The legislation would comply with all environmental laws and requires the full involvement of the Colorado River Indian Tribes (CRIT) during the development to ensure protection of cultural resources.

The legislation would create new, higher paying jobs for La Paz County residents and expand the County's tax base to provide services to its vulnerable populations. The County's permanent resident population is just under 21,000 with 38% of its residents over the age of 65. The unemployment rate stands at 6%, which is higher than the average for the state of Arizona. Nearly 27% of La Paz County residents are Latino who work primarily on farming operations. Over 18% of County residents are Native Americans and are members of the Colorado River Indian Tribes.

Land to enhance economic development opportunities is sparse in La Paz County. Currently, only 6% of the land in La Paz County is in private ownership. Federal, State or Tribal governments own almost 95% of the land within La Paz County, with roughly 64% managed by the Bureau of Land Management.

The bill builds upon the great success of the La Paz County Land Conveyance Act, which was enacted by Congress as part of the John D. Dingell, Jr. Conservation, Management and Recreation Act (S. 47). On May 22, 2020, Secretary Bernhardt signed over the deed to the 5,900 acres to La Paz County, which was conveyed to the County for fair market value. The County has signed a renewable energy development agreement with 174 Power Global who is expected to build the largest solar development in the nation. It is anticipated the project will build up to 1,000 MW of solar which is enough to power 300,000 homes. The construction phase will provide 800 - 1,000 jobs for La Paz County.

The 4,800 acres of land is located between Los Angeles and Phoenix and is immediately south of Interstate 10. It is adjacent to existing and proposed electric transmission facilities, natural gas lines, and fiber optic routes. This land connects to existing acreage that was conveyed to the County and other state lands that are also identified for renewable energy development. Due to its proximity to an electric transmission corridor, the site will become a renewable energy park development that would provide solar power to both the Phoenix metro area and southern California. La Paz County anticipates full development of the site within 5-10 years. The anticipated Ten West Transmission Line, which has the support of NRDC and the Audubon Society, would have capacity to carry the anticipated energy load.

The La Paz County Solar Energy and Job Creation Act is crucial to the economic future of La Paz County. Furthermore, it enhances opportunities for renewable energy development and creates numerous clean energy jobs for this rural county.