

## **Another desert megasolar project approved**

*The ninth big Inland solar plant to get the go-ahead in recent years will cover more five square miles of former farmland near Blythe.*

**David Danelski, Riverside Press Enterprise, 8-25-15**

BLYTHE -- Thanks to approval from the Obama administration Monday, another solar megaplant is headed for the Inland Southern California desert – this one to cover more than 5 square miles of former farmland just southwest of Blythe.

Blythe Mesa Solar Project is the ninth major energy project to be approved for sites in Riverside and San Bernardino counties. The 485-megawatt photovoltaic facility is expected to produce enough power for more than 145,000 homes in California.

Blythe has become the region's solar hotspot. This will be the third big project to be located just a few miles from the California border town of 20,000. The two others – the McCoy and Blythe projects – are under construction.

“It's just wonderful for the motels, restaurants and clothing stores,” said Jim Shipley, a volunteer with the Blythe Area Chamber of Commerce. “It's just wonderful for the local economy.”

The newest project is being built on mostly privately owned land once irrigated for citrus, alfalfa and other crops. It needed federal approval because about 4 miles of power lines will be built on public land to ferry the electricity to a Southern California Edison substation.

Unlike several of the other big solar projects, Blythe Mesa is not expected to disrupt endangered species habitat because of the site's previous agricultural use.

The project “is a great example of how we can produce needed new renewable energy while protecting the places we love,” said an email statement for Chase Huntley, a policy director at The Wilderness Society, based in Washington D.C.

It “is an example of how we can meet our clean energy goals with limited impact to wildlands and wildlife habitat,” he wrote.

Not everyone likes the project, sought by the Los Angeles-based Renewable Resources Group.

After Riverside County's approval of Blythe Mesa in May, the Colorado River Indian Tribes sued Riverside County, saying the county failed to adequately consider the potential effect on cultural and natural resources.

The tribe contends that artifacts are buried on the site and that the county failed to disclose, analyze or mitigate the project's effect on the tribes' heritage. The suit is pending.

U.S. Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell said in a statement that the administration works “closely with industry and state, tribal and local communities” when considering alternative energy projects.

“These projects not only provide clean energy and cut carbon emissions, but also strengthen local economies, generate good jobs and provide affordable, reliable, sustainable power across the West,” said Jewell's statement.