

Bureau of Land Management to lease out land for geothermal

Elizabeth Varin, Imperial Valley Press, 12-3-09

More than 3,000 acres will be available for geothermal energy production after the Bureau of Land Management announced it would lease out portions east of the Salton Sea.

Seven pieces of land will be leased out in the interest of balancing the need for renewable energy, protection of air quality and biological, cultural and visual values, acting El Centro field office manager Daniel Steward said in a press release. The public is best served with leasing the lands.

The bureau has already received two lease applications, said David Briery, public affairs specialist for the bureau.

Briery referred further questions to Project Manager John Dalton, who could not be reached for comment as of press time.

The project has been in the process since 2007, according to the press release.

A study was conducted between June and September 2007 to explore the possibility of leasing land near the Salton Sea, according to the press release. In late 2008 public comment was accepted and the decision was made.

The leasing process has already begun, but the public has the right to appeal the decision to the Interior Board of Land Appeals by Jan. 1.

Other groups, like the Imperial Irrigation District, have been aware that federal lands have been sought after by geothermal developers.

“We think it’s a positive development,” said IID Assistant to the General Manager Kevin Kelley.

IID owns several thousand acres that have geothermal potential and is exploring both public-private partnerships and joint ventures in the same area, he said.

About 550 megawatts are currently produced in Imperial Valley, he said.

The new leasing shouldn’t have a negative impact on IID’s interest in geothermal, Kelley said.

“The consensus would be geothermal development anywhere in the Valley is good for the industry,” he said.