

US greenlights major transmission line for renewable energy in Western states

May 19 2023, by Susan Montoya Bryan



A pump jack and wind turbines stand inside of a cotton field on Oct. 18, 2015, near Lamesa, Texas. The U.S. government is greenlighting a proposed multibillion-dollar transmission line Thursday, May 18, 2023, that would send primarily wind-generated electricity from the rural plains of New Mexico to big cities in the West Credit: Edyta Blaszczyk/Odessa American via AP, File

The U.S. government is greenlighting a proposed multibillion-dollar transmission line that would send primarily wind-generated electricity from the rural plains of New Mexico to big cities in the West.

The Interior Department announced its record of decision for the SunZia project Thursday. It comes about a year after an environmental review was completed as part of a broader effort by the Biden administration to clear the way for major [transmission](#) projects as it looks to meet climate goals and shore up the nation's power grid.

The SunZia transmission project in New Mexico has been more than a decade in the making. The U.S. Defense Department and others initially raised concerns about the path of the high-voltage lines, prompting the developer to submit a new application in 2021 to modify the route.

New Mexico's renewable energy authority is among those invested in the SunZia project, which would include roughly 520 miles (836 kilometers) of [transmission lines](#) and a network of substations for getting wind and [solar power](#) to Arizona and California.

The anchor tenant is California-based Pattern Energy, which has been busy building massive wind farms in central New Mexico.

Federal land managers said they completed the latest review in less than two years.

"The Department of the Interior is committed to expanding clean energy development to address climate change, enhance America's energy security and provide for good-paying union jobs," Laura Daniel-Davis, principal deputy assistant secretary for land and minerals management, said in a statement.

The Bureau of Land Management has approved nearly three dozen

[renewable energy](#) and grid improvement projects since 2021. Included are solar and geothermal projects that officials said would be capable of producing enough electricity to power more than 2.6 million homes.

More than 150 applications for solar and wind development are still in the agency's queue, official said.

Land managers also are reviewing two other major transmission projects that would funnel electricity generated from renewable sources in remote spots to large western markets. One would run through seven counties from Las Vegas to Reno, Nevada, and the other would stretch between central Utah and east-central Nevada.

Pattern Energy announced Monday that it signed long-term purchase agreements with Shell Energy North America and the University of California for a portion of the electricity that will be flowing through SunZia.

Construction is expected to start later this year. It will be about three years until the line begins delivering power, the company said.

Pattern CEO Hunter Armistead has said SunZia will be able to tap "some of the best wind in the world." He explained that the wind farms in New Mexico have a [wind](#) generation profile with an evening peak that will complement daytime solar generation elsewhere.

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Citation: US greenlights major transmission line for renewable energy in Western states (2023, May 19) retrieved 13 July 2024 from <https://techxplore.com/news/2023-05-greenlights-major-transmission-line-renewable.html>

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