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Bureau of Land Management, Colorado collaborate to advance efficient geothermal development

The Bureau of Land Management and the Colorado Department of Natural Resources have signed an agreement designed to assist geothermal energy development on state and federal lands and mineral holdings.

The Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) will allow more efficient and effective leasing, permitting and administration of geothermal resources in Colorado where federal ownership or administration is involved. The MOU should streamline geothermal work by fostering better cooperation and communication between the agencies.

“The Bureau supports renewable energy development on public lands to meet the nation’s energy needs,” said Helen Hankins, Bureau of Land Management Colorado State Director. “By working with the state, we want to make it easier to take advantage of opportunities for geothermal energy development.”

“We look forward to collaborating with our partners at the Bureau of Land Management to ensure Colorado can benefit from its geothermal energy potential,” said Mike King, executive director of the Department of Natural Resources. “This work creates jobs, builds and diversifies local economies and harnesses a clean and reliable source of energy.”

The clean energy potential on America's public lands is significant, which is why the Interior is investing \$41 million through the President's economic recovery plan to facilitate a rapid and responsible move to large-scale production of renewable energy. The BLM currently manages more than 816 geothermal leases as of December 2010 in California, Colorado, Idaho, Nevada, New Mexico, Oregon and Utah. Last November, BLM Colorado leased an 800-acre geothermal parcel in Buena Vista during its quarterly lease sale. This was the first of its kind for Colorado in 35 years. The BLM is also evaluating geothermal leasing in at least two other field offices in southwestern Colorado.

Colorado ranks extremely high nationally in geothermal potential. An MIT report written by a team of international experts calculated that Colorado has the largest quantity of geothermal heat of any U.S. state that could potentially be used to generate electricity in the depth range of 10- to 13,000 feet - a depth easily reached by oil drilling rigs. A separate study by the Idaho National Laboratory showed that Colorado ranks fourth in the nation in the number of hot-spring sites with good potential for geothermal electricity generation.

The MOU ensures an exchange of information and consultation between agencies when BLM and the Colorado State Land Board receive nominations to lease geothermal parcels, as well as when any other division within DNR seeks to convey rights to geothermal resources. The agreement also ensures that lessees will be notified of applicable state and federal laws and regulations related to water rights, rights-of-way issues and protection of existing geothermal features.

The BLM is responsible for leasing and developing geothermal resources on the federal mineral estates, including such resources beneath U.S. Forest Service lands. The Colorado State Land Board, a division of the DNR, manages three million acres of land and four million acres of mineral rights that the federal government gave to Colorado to generate revenue for public education and some of the state's institutions.