

# California Solar Project Gets U.S. Approval

By [RYAN TRACY](#)

WASHINGTON—The Interior Secretary Wednesday approved the highest capacity solar-panel plant ever constructed on public-owned land.

The approval cleared a permitting hurdle for [First Solar Inc.](#)'s 550-megawatt Desert Sunlight project, which needed to pass an environmental review from the Interior Department because it is being built on federal land.

Company spokesman Alan Bernheimer said the approval was a "major milestone" and paves the way for construction to begin this month in the California desert, east of Palm Springs.

First Solar will supply thin-film photovoltaic solar panels, build, and operate the project, but is looking to sell it to a new owner and hasn't yet announced a buyer. It sold an Arizona solar farm last week to [NRG Energy](#) under a similar arrangement after the Energy Department finalized a loan guarantee for that project.

A \$1.88 billion federal loan guarantee for Desert Sunlight is still pending. The Energy Department offered the guarantee in June, contingent on certain conditions.

The power plant will occupy 4,100 acres and generate enough energy to power 165,000 homes. It will send electricity to Southern California Edison, a subsidiary of [Edison International](#). The

plant "will help power our nation and economy," Interior Secretary Ken Salazar said in a statement.

Interior has approved three other solar-power plants in California with capacities greater than 550 megawatts. Those facilities use solar-thermal technology to reflect the sun's heat and use it to drive generators, while Desert Sunlight will use photovoltaic panels that absorb sunlight and convert it to electricity.

Wednesday's approval is part of a wider Obama administration effort to speed up permitting for power plants that use renewable energy.

By approving more large-scale solar projects, "we continue to make significant strides in spurring innovation, job-creation, and investment in the private sector while strengthening America's energy security," Mr. Salazar added.