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>>> FALL 2023 NEWSLETTER

# THE PERMITTING COUNCIL UPDATE





On behalf of the Permitting
Council, I hope you are having a
fantastic fall. I have met many of
you over these last few months
on the job, but for those who I
have yet to meet, my name is Eric
Beightel and I am thrilled to join
the Council as the new Executive
Director. In life, we rarely have

the opportunity to land our dream job. But for me, a proud NEPA-nerd and environmental policy wonk, the Executive Director of the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council is indeed my dream job. I am humbled, honored, and incredibly excited to serve in this role.

In order to achieve the President's goal of transitioning to sustainable clean energy, growing the economy, and delivering on the promise of the generational investments in America's infrastructure, the federal government has to provide predictable, transparent, and efficient environmental reviews and approvals. The Permitting Council is tasked with doing just that.

The Council has a unique opportunity to support federal and state agencies in completing timely reviews and decision making by providing funds, tools, and best practices. I want to focus the Office of the Executive Director on customer service - being a facilitator, connector, and shepherd of the environmental review process. While we cannot determine the outcome of the process, we can make sure that the process works effectively and efficiently, protecting the environment and engaging the public in meaningful ways that will produce better outcomes.

Under my leadership, I hope to actively engage all of our stakeholders to understand better what your pressure points are and to work collaboratively to identify solutions. In my nearly 25 years of experience with the environmental review and permitting of infrastructure, I have seen a lot, but I do not pretend to have seen it all. I want to learn from our project sponsors, our federal partners, our state partners, and our stakeholders to help us make the process work better. I firmly believe that only through that open and ongoing dialogue will we be able to both move individual projects through the process while also identifying and implementing programmatic solutions.

It is an incredibly exciting time to serve. I am very much looking forward to working with the experienced and expert Permitting Council staff, the Permitting Council members, and the agency Chief Environmental Permitting Review Officers (CERPOs) to clear the way to building our Nation for the 21st Century. We have a lot of work to accomplish, but together we will deliver a more sustainable and prosperous future for all Americans.

There have been some pretty exciting developments in permitting over the last several weeks, including major funding going out to federal agencies and Tribes to help arm them with the critical resources they need to help us accomplish our worthy goal. Please check out this newsletter for information on those developments and so much more.

-Eric Beightel, Permitting Council Executive Director

## NEWS FROM THE OFFICE OF THE EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR

Biden Administration
Appoints Rebecca Higgins
as Chief of Staff for the
Permitting Council



The Permitting Council is pleased to welcome Rebecca Higgins as its first Chief of Staff. Higgins comes to the Permitting Council from the U.S. Senate Committee on Environment and Public Works (EPW) where she served as a senior policy advisor.

As Chief of Staff, Higgins will assist Permitting Council Executive Director Eric Beightel as the agency manages a portfolio of nearly \$100 billion in large-scale infrastructure projects—including those in the renewable energy, coastal restoration, broadband, and electricity transmission sectors. An established transportation and infrastructure policy expert,

Higgins comes to the Permitting Council with extensive experience drafting and negotiating legislation on Capitol Hill. Her expertise in environmental permitting review will greatly benefit the Permitting Council as it works to transform the permitting process.

While on Capitol Hill, Higgins led the Environment and Public Works Committee's transportation and environmental permitting teams, establishing priorities and communicating recommendations to the Chairman and Senate leadership. She served as lead author and negotiator of the \$350 billion highway title of the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law and key provisions of the Inflation Reduction Act. Prior to her work for Chairman Tom Carper, Higgins served as a senior policy analyst at the Department of Transportation where she focused on streamlining environmental review and project delivery, and as an energy industry analyst at the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission.

## Biden Administration Appoints Alexis K. Segal as Permitting Council Director of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs



The Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council (Permitting Council) is pleased to announce the appointment of Alexis K. Segal as the agency's new Director of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs. Segal most recently served as a senior policy advisor for environment and natural resources for U.S. Senator Dianne Feinstein.

"It is a privilege and an honor to take on this vital role at the Permitting Council," says Segal. "I am excited to use my background in environmental policy and my years of experience on Capitol Hill to improve the federal permitting process, bringing efficiency and accountability to the forefront in order to realize transformational infrastructure across the nation," says Segal.

As the Director of Legislative and Intergovernmental Affairs, Segal will work closely with members of Congress and leaders at the federal, state and local levels in order to make the federal permitting process better coordinated and more collaborative and to achieve the Biden-Harris administration's ambitious infrastructure goals. Prior to taking on this role Segal served for seven years as a senior policy advisor on Capitol Hill, working on a variety of issues including environmental infrastructure, climate and energy. In 2023 she served as the lead on efforts to secure \$442 million to implement U.S. Army Corps of Engineers infrastructure projects in California.

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#### NEWS FROM THE PERMITTING COUNCIL

## Permitting Council Allocates Millions to Aid in Federal Permitting



Historic funding from President Biden's Inflation Reduction Act invested \$350 million into the work of the Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council (Permitting Council) to advance permitting efficiency and predictability. There have been many developments as we worked to put this funding to work, including the following:

Biden-Harris Administration Invests Nearly \$155 Million to Increase Federal Agency Permitting Review Efficiency and Effectiveness as Part of Investing in America Agenda

The Permitting Council Office of the Executive Director allocated \$155 million in funding to aid federal agencies to carry out their infrastructure permitting review and authorization responsibilities. From hiring permitting experts to acquiring vital tools and resources, this funding will allow agencies to take significant steps to improve federal permitting review timelines and predictability and bring critically needed infrastructure projects to life across the nation.



Federal agencies have long identified a lack of resources as a major roadblock in the permitting review and authorization process, and the Permitting Council Executive Director is leveraging the ERIF to aid them in fulfilling their infrastructure permitting responsibilities. The historic investment from the IRA allows the Executive Director to make targeted investments that will address immediate staffing

needs while also looking programmatically across government to make investments in long-term solutions. This first round of funding provides agencies with the staff capacity and resources they need to effectively and efficiently complete necessary environmental reviews and approvals on critical infrastructure projects that will grow our economy and support our transition to a cleaner, more sustainable energy future. **Learn more in the link below.** 

To learn more about the investment to increase federal agency permitting reviews, <u>click here</u>.

Biden-Harris Administration Announces New Program to Bolster Tribal Engagement in the Environmental Review Process for FAST- 41 Infrastructure Projects

### AVAILABLE FUNDING

Applications are now open for the Permitting Council's Environmental Review Improvement Fund Tribal Assistance Program (ERIF TAP). Recognizing the unfair burden and capacity issues many Tribal Nations face when engaging in the federal permitting process, the Permitting Council Executive Director directed these funds for Tribal assistance after the agency received funding in the Inflation Reduction Act. Eligible Tribes can use these funds to access critically needed resources to help fulfill their permitting review responsibilities, ensuring a more meaningful and effective seat at the table during the environmental review process. Funds can be used toward technical training, survey equipment, reimbursing cultural experts, staffing and more. Learn more about how funding will aid Tribes in the permitting review process in the link below.

#### Permitting Council Allocates \$25 Million to Improve Permitting IT Tools

Executive Director Eric Beightel recently attended the first-ever White House Environmental Permitting Technology and Data Summit and announced \$25 million in funding to support IT development in the infrastructure permitting review process. These funds are made available as part of the historic \$350 million investment into the work of the Permitting Council from the Inflation Reduction Act. These funds are made available as part of the historic \$350 million investment into the work of the Permitting Council from the Inflation Reduction Act. These funds will enable federal agencies to develop and modernize their IT tools, which will help increase efficiency and timeliness in the permitting review process. These upgrades will also assisting



in facilitating data sharing and coordination across agencies and will enable improved transparency and public engagement in the environmental review and permitting process. Learn more in the link below.

To learn more about the ERIF TAP, click here.

To learn more about the funding to improve permitting IT tools, <u>click here</u>.



## Permitting Council Moves to Designate the Critical Minerals Supply Chain as a FAST-41 Sector

The Permitting Council recently proposed to revise the FAST-41 mining sector regulations to focus on critical minerals and the full critical minerals supply chain, including critical minerals refining, recycling, and beneficiation, in addition to mining. As the nation works to address the increasing demand for minerals such as lithium and nickel to build a clean energy economy, the Permitting Council is working to make sure that the critical mineral projects covered by FAST-41 are leading the way.

As the global economy accelerates its adoption of clean energy technology, demand for critical minerals is set to leap exponentially, skyrocketing by 400-600 percent over the next few decades. For some critical minerals, like those used in electric vehicle batteries, the need will be even greater, growing as much as 4,000 percent. With this proposal, the Permitting Council is providing critical mineral projects that seek and obtain FAST-41 coverage with a path towards efficient and predictable environmental reviews and authorizations, without shortchanging essential community engagement, Tribal consultation, and environmental protections.

The Permitting Council recently accepted the first critical minerals project to ever receive FAST-41 coverage, the South32 Hermosa Project. If permitted by the federal reviewing agencies, the \$1.7 billion proposed zinc and manganese mining and processing operation would be the first example of a critical mineral mining project that strengthens the domestic supply chain of critical minerals that received the benefits of the FAST-41 program. The Permitting Council will engage with critical minerals companies in the coming weeks and months to ensure building a robust portfolio of domestic critical minerals mining and supply chain projects. *Learn more in the link below.* 



#### Permitting Council Executive Director Releases Quarterly Member Agency Performance Report

Executive Director Eric Beightel released the fiscal year 2023 third quarter report this fall, assessing federal agencies' compliance with FAST-41. The report showcases a period of growth and stability for agencies implementing FAST-41, with increased conformance to FAST-41 requirements, along with indicators of areas for continued improvement.



To learn more about the South32 Hermosa Project, click here.

the third quarter, with the majority of the projects in renewable energy-related sectors. Two new projects received coverage during this time, including the first critical minerals mining project—the South32 Hermosa Critical Minerals project—and the portfolio's second broadband project—the Alaska FiberOptic Project Segment 1. Two projects completed the federal permitting process during the quarter, including the Alaska LNG Pipeline Project, and the Mountain Valley and Equitrans Expansion Project, which was approved as part of the Fiscal Responsibility Act of 2023.

The third quarter report highlights a number of federal agency accomplishments and areas for improvement, including:

- Agencies met coordinated project plan establishment requirements, including interagency consultation requirements, for all six applicable projects on the Dashboard.
- Agencies satisfied coordinated project plan review and update requirements for all 26 applicable projects on the Dashboard.
- There were 47 federal agency milestones with completion anticipated during the reporting period. Of those, agencies completed 15 and extended nine in accordance with the FAST-41 process.
- For the other 23 federal agency milestones whose completion was anticipated during
  the reporting period, the agencies provided explanations for missed completion dates
  and completed monthly status reports as required by FAST-41 approximately 93
  percent of the time. Those explanations and reports are available on the Federal
  Permitting Dashboard, which the Permitting Council maintains.

To view the quarterly report, and learn more about the projects, click the link below.



#### Billion Dollar Transmission Line Project Breaks Ground After Receiving Permitting Approval

Federal and state leaders gathered near Corona, NM in September for a groundbreaking ceremony to officially kick off construction of the FAST-41 covered SunZia Southwest Transmission project. Federal Permitting Improvement Steering Council (Permitting Council) Executive Director Eric Beightel joined with Department of the Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, New Mexico Senator Martin Heinrich, Congresswoman Melanie Stansbury and White House Senior Advisor John Podesta to celebrate the \$1 billion project that will play a significant role in President Biden's clean energy agenda.

The SunZia Southwest Transmission project recently received final federal environmental review and authorization approval, clearing the way for the project to advance clean energy by providing electricity transmission infrastructure in the west.

To learn more about the projects above, click the following links: <u>South32 Hermosa Critical Minerals</u>, <u>Alaska FiberOptic Project Segment 1</u>, <u>Alaska LNG Pipeline Project</u>, and <u>Mountain Valley and Equitrans Expansion</u>.

To view the quarterly report, visit <u>Permitting.gov</u>.



Left Image (From Left to Right): Eric Beightel, Permitting Council Executive Director. John Podesta, Biden Administration Senior Adviser for Clean Energy Innovation and Implementation. Hunter Armistead, CEO of Pattern Energy.

Right Image (From Left to Right): Senator Martin Heinrich, New Mexico. PoQueen Rivera, Permitting Council Director of Tribal Affairs. Eric Beightel, Permitting Council Executive Director.

The project will consist of a ±525-kV high voltage direct current (HVDC) transmission line that will run through 550 miles of federal, state and private land in Central Arizona and New Mexico. Once constructed, the project will transport up to 3,000 megawatts of primarily renewable energy from New Mexico to markets in western states. New Mexico is home to a significant source of wind energy and this project will enable the delivery of those resources to areas with high demand.

The SunZia Southwest Transmission project is connected to the SunZia Wind project, a planned 3,500 MW renewable energy project also located in New Mexico. Together, SunZia Wind and Transmission could comprise the largest renewable energy infrastructure project in U.S. history. These projects are estimated to supply over 2,000 temporary construction jobs and 150 permanent jobs once operational and could bring clean power resources to 3 million Americans. *Learn more in the link below.* 



#### Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion Project Breaks Ground

Permitting Council Executive Director Eric Beightel attended the groundbreaking ceremony for the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion project this past August. This innovative FAST-41 covered project is focused on restoring Louisiana's Barataria Basin, which is experiencing some of the highest levels of land loss in the country, threatening the welfare of residents and the local ecosystem.

To learn more about the SunZia Southwest Transmission project, click here.

To learn more about the Mid-Barataria Sediment Diversion project, click here.

Sponsored by the Louisiana Coastal Protection and Restoration Authority (CPRA), the project will reintroduce freshwater and sediment from the Mississippi River to the Barataria Basin to build, sustain, and maintain land in an area that is experiencing extreme land loss. The project will reconnect the Mississippi River to its wetlands, ultimately working to protect some of the most vulnerable residents in the state, in addition to sustaining the ecosystem and wildlife on the coast. This area is also one

of the most affected by the 2010 Deepwater Horizon oil spill, and this project will work to remediate the decade-long damage still being experienced.

The Louisiana CPRA worked closely with the Permitting Council Office of the Executive Director throughout the permitting process for this project, showcasing how the collaboration and coordination of FAST-41 can lead to an efficient and accountable process. *Learn more in the link below.* 



#### **NEW FAST-41 PROJECTS**



#### Alaska FiberOptic Project Segment 1

The Permitting Council is pleased to announce that segment one of the Alaska FiberOptic Project is now covered under the benefits of the FAST-41 program. If permitted, this project will bring broadband infrastructure to Alaska Native Villages in one of the most rural and underserved regions in the country.

The estimated \$51 million project would install fiber broadband infrastructure directly to Alaskan Native Villages along the Yukon River where the digital divide is a persistent issue, benefitting over 500 families. If permitted, it is expected that this project will aid residents and institutions throughout the community, including students in need of broadband technology for schooling, senior citizens, health care providers, small businesses and law enforcement. This project is a partnership between Doyon, Limited, the regional Alaska Native corporation, and Alaska Communications. Funding for this project comes from the National Telecommunications and Information Administration's Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program. *Learn more in the link below.* 

To learn more about the Tribal Broadband Connectivity Program, click here.

To learn more about the Alaska FiberOptic Project Segment 1 project, click here.



#### **Sparrows Point Container Terminal**

The Permitting Council is pleased to announce that the Sparrows Point Container Terminal is one of the latest projects to gain coverage under FAST-41. If permitted, this 330-acre redevelopment project will feature a new container terminal and intermodal yard, creating thousands of port-related jobs in Sparrows Point, Maryland.

The US Army Corps of Engineers serves as the lead agency for this project's environmental permitting review, with the Department of Interior's Fish and Wildlife Service and the Department of Commerce's National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration serving as coordinating agencies. **Learn more in the link below.** 



#### **Vineyard Northeast Project**

The Permitting Council is pleased to announce that the Vineyard Northeast Wind project is now covered under the FAST-41 program. If permitted, this multi-billion dollar project is projected to produce 2600 megawatts, delivering clean energy to over 1 million homes across New England.

The Vineyard Northeast Wind project includes 160 total wind turbine generators within the lease area (OCS-A 0522) located approximately 31 miles from Nantucket, Massachusetts and 39 miles from Martha's Vineyard, Massachusetts. The offshore export cable will be installed within two offshore export cable corridors (OECCs)—the Massachusetts OECC and the Connecticut OECC—that connect to onshore transmission systems in Bristol County, Massachusetts and New London County, Connecticut.

The Permitting Council is the central coordinating body for permitting offshore wind energy in the United States. The agency is also a key implementing agent of the Biden-Harris Administration's goal to deploy 30 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind in the United States by 2030, while protecting biodiversity and promoting ocean co-use. The Council portfolio currently includes a significant number of offshore wind projects, with a total of 16 covered offshore wind projects making up over 52 percent of the FAST-41 portfolio. These projects are projected to produce over 28 gigawatts of energy. *Learn more in the link below.* 

To learn more about the Sparrows Point Container Terminal project, click here.

To learn more about the Vineyard Northeast Project, click here.

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## LATEST FAST-41 PROJECTS COMPLETING FEDERAL PERMIT REVIEW



#### **Revolution Wind**

The Revolution Wind project has officially received final federal permitting review approval. This \$1.5 billion offshore wind project will bring 704 MW of clean energy to Connecticut and Rhode Island, generating enough energy to power more than 250,000 homes.

Located 15 miles south of Rhode Island and 32 miles southeast of Connecticut, the Revolution Wind project is a utility scale offshore wind farm. When operational, it will bring 304 MW of clean energy to Connecticut and 400 MW to Rhode Island, displacing more than one million metric tons of carbon pollution-- equivalent to taking over 150,000 cars off the road. Offshore wind development is a priority across the Biden-Harris Administration, which set a goal to deploy 30 gigawatts (GW) of offshore wind energy capacity by 2030. *Learn more in the link below.* 

#### **GETTING TO KNOW OUR NEW DIRECTOR**

The Permitting Council is pleased to welcome our new Executive Director, Eric Beightel. A nationally recognized expert in the environmental and infrastructure fields, Eric brings more than 20 years of experience to the Permitting Council, including significant time spent in federal service. Beightel's extensive public and private sector experience honed his command of the National Environmental Policy Act and his capacity for solving complex environmental permitting problems on the local, state and national level.



To learn more about the Revolution Wind project, click here.

His experience includes serving as a senior environmental policy advisor at the Department of Transportation, developing and implementing strategies to reduce permitting and review timelines while delivering better outcomes for communities and the environment. He also worked as a policy advisor at the Office of Management and Budget, serving as a subject matter expert on the federal permitting and review process for major infrastructure projects. In the private sector Beightel worked for WSP, USA as a senior director and vice president, working with clients to develop innovative strategies to navigate the federal environmental regulatory framework efficiently. Most recently he served as an associate vice president and national lead for infrastructure policy and environmental strategy at HDR, Inc., a global engineering, architecture, environmental and construction services firm.



As we welcome our new Executive Director to the Council, we took some time to get to know him better.



Starting a new position is often a whirlwind of activity that doesn't settle down for quite some time. If you could sum up your first six months in this new role, how would you describe it?

Eric Beightel: It has been a whirlwind, to be sure, but it also has been very comfortable as I stepped into a role that I've been working towards throughout my career. For better or worse, many of the issues we face today are the same ones we've been battling for the better part of the last two decades or more. But this time it does seem different - the appetite for meaningful change in our approach and our processes is greater than it's ever been. I can't remember the last time that "permitting" was something they talked about on CNN, but here we are. And to me, that reflects the importance of the job that's in front of us and captures the significance of the opportunity. For the first six months or so, I've really focused on getting to know my team, building relationships with our agency partners and engaging with industry and other stakeholders to get their perspective on what's working and what isn't.



With stakeholders ranging from the White House and private industry to local community groups, there are high expectations for what this agency can do to improve the federal permitting process. What are you most excited about as you take command of the agency? And how do you see the coordination, collaboration, and transparency of the FAST-41 process assisting in making the agency more accountable?

*Eric Beightel:* As I mentioned above - the recognition that we need to do something is important. We've historically taken baby steps, effecting incremental changes to the processes, but that approach is not going to help us reach our clean energy goals or rebuild our aging infrastructure to carry us forward into the economic growth this country anticipates. Our unique perspective working with a variety of stakeholders and understanding their concerns and how the sometimes conflicting objectives can result in project delays or loss in momentum also provides us with the opportunity to look across the landscape and come up with innovative solutions. And at the end of the day, that's what the Permitting Council should be - a solutions-focused agency that provides technical assistance and coordination across stakeholders to advance the nation's most critical infrastructure projects.



Clearly you have lived and breathed the permitting process in positions across the government and private sectors. What elements of your past experiences do you think will most serve you in this new role?

*Eric Beightel:* Having worked on both sides of the issue helps me understand the different perspectives that stakeholders bring to the table. We are all trying to move these projects forward in an environmentally responsible way, seeking and considering meaningful public input and ultimately delivering critical infrastructure that will help grow the economy and reduce our contributions to climate change. But oftentimes, we get so bogged down with our individual needs and responsibilities that we lose sight of the big picture. Our role at the Permitting Council is to help bring that perspective and advocate for a better process to make decisions faster.





Let's get personal...tell us something we don't know about Eric Beightel:

#### Eric Beightel:

- Your favorite thing to watch: I grew up in Lawrence, Kansas, home of the University of Kansas where I also completed my undergraduate studies. So it goes without saying that the Jayhawks have been a huge part of my life and I try to catch every televised basketball or football game if possible. College football bowl season and college basketball's March Madness are two of the best times of the year as a sports fan.
- Your favorite vacation/vacation memory: My favorite vacation memory so far is when we took our son to Disney World, and he saw Mickey in real life for the first time. He had developed a huge love for the mouse, but throughout the day had been pretty

shy with the other characters that we had seen. When we saw Mickey towards the end of the first day in a spot where there weren't many others around, my son just filled with joy and ran towards him, fearless, and gave him a huge hug. It was a really special moment.

 Your favorite way to spend family time: Not sure if it's my absolute favorite, but both kids play travel soccer, so most of our family time is spent at the pitch.





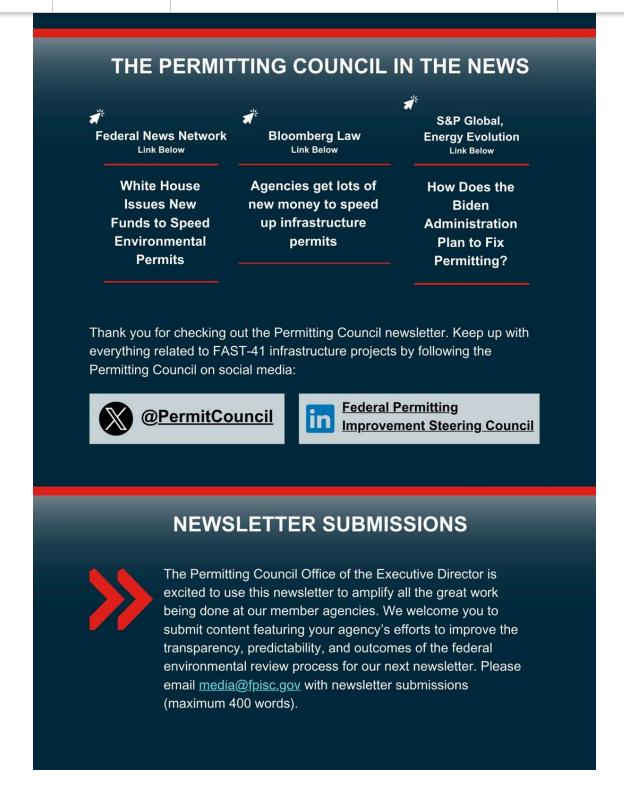
Is there anything else you would like to leave our newsletter community?

*Eric Beightel:* I'm extremely grateful for this opportunity and look forward to improving the way we review and approve critical infrastructure projects.

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