



News Release



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Public Input Drives Next Steps for Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan

Federal and State Agencies Outline Phased Approach Starting with Public Lands Component

SACRAMENTO, Calif. – The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), California Energy Commission (CEC) and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) today outlined next steps in moving forward with the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP).

Based on an initial review of public comments received on the draft DRECP that were submitted by a diverse group of stakeholders, the agencies are adjusting the planning process and will use a phased approach to approve the plan’s three fundamental components: the BLM Land Use Plan Amendment; federal General Conservation Plan; and the state Natural Community Conservation Plan.

“Using a phased approach to the DRECP allows us to build on county priorities and address local needs in the planning process,” said Karen Douglas, Commissioner of the California Energy Commission. “We believe moving forward in this way will help California and the nation meet long-term climate and clean energy goals while conserving our desert’s unique and valuable resources.”

The agencies will start by completing the BLM component of the DRECP that designates development focus areas and conservation areas on public lands while providing additional time for the state and federal agencies to work with counties and other stakeholders to address issues and concerns with the General Conservation Plan and the Natural Community Conservation Plan components, including the proposed permitting processes.

Continued engagement with the counties will help determine the best options and timing for proceeding with the private land components and better align renewable energy development and conservation at the local, state and federal level. It will also allow the agencies to explore opportunities for a tailored, county-by-county approach that fits with the DRECP plan.

“The agencies are committed to maintaining linkage between the BLM Land Use Plan and other components of the DRECP,” said Jim Kenna, California State Director for the Bureau of Land Management. “We will continue our interagency coordination to achieve the goals of the DRECP.”

“The phased approach continues to provide the Fish and Wildlife Service with exceptional opportunities to work with public agencies and private landowners to provide for species conservation and renewable energy development on an unprecedented landscape scale,” said Ren Lohofener, Pacific Southwest Regional Director, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. “We will continue to work in concert with the State and BLM as we fine tune the plan.”

“Moving forward in this manner gives our agency the opportunity to evaluate a range of possible conservation approaches and fully address concerns raised during the public comment period,” said Kevin Hunting, Chief Deputy Director of California Department of Fish & Wildlife. “It also provides for a short-term focus on completing the federal Land Use Plan which is an important part of any desert conservation strategy.”

The draft DRECP was released for public review on Sept. 23, 2014. During the five month comment period that ended Feb. 23, 2015, the collaborating agencies received about 12,000 comments. While the comments are still being reviewed, several key themes emerged, prompting the decision to move forward with a phased approach. The primary driver for the decision came from feedback from the counties within the planning area requesting additional time and closer coordination with state and federal agencies to ensure better alignment between county planning, renewable energy, conservation and the objectives of the DRECP. Other comments included the need to more clearly outline permitting efficiencies and conservation protections.

There was also support for identifying the most appropriate places in the desert for renewable energy and for having the BLM component of the DRECP in place to establish conservation protections for recreation, cultural, scenic and other natural resource values in the California Desert Conservation Area and the Alabama Hills.

The DRECP is an innovative renewable energy and conservation plan covering more than 22 million acres of lands in Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino and San Diego counties. This effort proposes to protect areas in the California desert that are important for wildlife, recreation, cultural and other uses while also facilitating the timely permitting of solar, wind and geothermal energy projects and associated transmission in appropriate areas.

For more information about the DRECP, including a list of public comments, please visit www.drecp.org.

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