



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

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Notice of Areas of Critical Environmental Concern in the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment, California

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management.

ACTION: Notice.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, and the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976, as amended, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced availability of the Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) with a Notice of Availability published in the Federal Register on November 13, 2015 (80 FR 70254). The Proposed LUPA would amend the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan and the Bakersfield and Bishop Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The Proposed DRECP LUPA/Final EIS considers designation of 134 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). In order to comply with Federal Regulations at 43 CFR 1610.7-2(b), the BLM through this notice is announcing a 60-day public comment period on those 134 ACECs. The 134 ACECs listed in this notice are identical to those identified in the alternatives found within the Proposed DRECP LUPA/Final EIS addressed by the publication of the Federal Notice of Availability on November 13, 2015. The scope of this 60-day

comment period is limited to these 134 ACEC designations. Comments on other topics are outside the scope of this public comment process

DATES: The comment period pertaining to these ACEC designations closes on [INSERT DATE 60 DAYS AFTER DATE OF PUBLICATION IN THE FEDERAL REGISTER]. All comments must be in writing and must be postmarked no later than the close of the last day of the comment period. The BLM provided a 152-day comment period on the Draft DRECP LUPA and Environmental Impact Report (EIR)/EIS. All comments received on the Draft DRECP were considered while developing the Proposed LUPA/Final EIS. As such, the BLM is only seeking comments on the 134 ACECs included in the Proposed LUPA/Final EIS, which are listed in this notice. While the BLM will consider all such comments, it does not intend to respond to each comment individually.

ADDRESSES: Comments must be in writing and must be sent to Vicki Campbell, DRECP Program Manager, 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623, Sacramento, CA 95825; or email blm_ca_drecp@blm.gov.

Copies of the DRECP Proposed LUPA/Final EIS were sent to affected Federal, State, and local government agencies, affected tribal governments, and to other stakeholders concurrent with the November 13, 2015 Notice of Availability. The environmental analysis for the DRECP, including the Draft DRECP and the DRECP Proposed LUPA/Final EIS, is available for review online at www.drecp.org and www.blm.gov/ca/drecp. Please see **SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION** below for a list of locations where copies of the DRECP Proposed LUPA/Final EIS are available for public inspection.

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Vicki Campbell, Program Manager, DRECP, telephone 916-978-4401; address BLM California State Office, 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623, Sacramento, CA 95825; email vlcampbell@blm.gov. To request a DVD, please send an email to drecp.info@energy.ca.gov or call 916-978-4401 and include the mailing address in the message. Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Information Relay Service (FIRS) at 1-800-877-8339 to contact the above individual during normal business hours. The FIRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to leave a message or question with the above individual. You will receive a reply during normal business hours.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: The DRECP was developed with broad public participation through an 6-year collaborative planning process, beginning with publication of a Notice of Intent to amend the CDCA Plan in the Federal Register on November 20, 2009 (74 FR 60291). Subsequently, the BLM and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) as co-lead agencies jointly published on July 29, 2011 a Notice of Intent to prepare an EIS for the proposed DRECP (76 FR 45606). The BLM published a third Notice of Intent on April 4, 2012 (77 FR 20409), amending the November 20, 2009, and July 29, 2011, notices to include the Bishop, Caliente/Bakersfield, and Eastern San Diego County RMPs in the DRECP LUPA.

As explained in more detail below, the Draft DRECP, which included a Draft BLM LUPA for the CDCA Plan, and the Bishop and Caliente/Bakersfield RMPs, was published on September 26, 2014, (76 FR 57971). The Notice of Availability for the DRECP Proposed LUPA and Final EIS was published on November 13, 2015. In each of these documents and at associated public meetings, the BLM presented a robust

discussion of ACECs. The Draft DRECP identified 147 ACECs (58 new and 89 existing), while the Proposed LUPA/Final EIS considered 134 ACECs (all of which are listed below) based on cooperator and stakeholder comments.

The Draft DRECP was developed by the BLM, USFWS, California Energy Commission, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (collectively, “DRECP Partner Agencies”) to: (1) Advance Federal and State natural resource conservation goals and other Federal land management goals; (2) Meet the requirements of the Federal Endangered Species Act, California Endangered Species Act, Natural Community Conservation Planning Act, and Federal Land Policy and Management Act in the Mojave and Colorado/Sonoran desert region of Southern California; and (3) Facilitate the timely and streamlined permitting of renewable energy projects.

In December 2012, the DRECP Partner Agencies published the Description and Comparative Evaluation of Draft DRECP Alternatives to inform the public about the status of the DRECP alternatives. Members of the public were invited to provide input regarding the development scenarios, conservation designations, and BLM LUPA alternatives, as well as other specific elements presented. Specific to the LUPA, this document included maps showing existing and proposed “Desert Conservation Lands” (existing and proposed ACECs, proposed National Conservation Lands, and proposed Wildlife Allocations), as well as areas managed for recreation and existing and proposed Special Recreation Management Areas. The BLM also disclosed that the land use plan amendments would identify: (1) Desired outcomes expressed as specific goals and objectives; and (2) Allowable uses and management actions designed to achieve those

specific goals and objectives. The public was especially encouraged to provide input about the differences among the alternatives.

The Draft DRECP included a strategy that identified and mapped potential areas for renewable energy development and areas for long-term natural resource conservation. The Draft DRECP was released for comment on September 26, 2014, with comments being accepted until February 23, 2015. It included a Draft BLM LUPA for the CDCA Plan, and the Bishop and Caliente/Bakersfield RMPs. The Draft BLM LUPA included six alternatives for the expansion, reduction, modification, and creation of ACECs, ranging from 3,308,000 acres (including 1,048,000 acres within Wilderness Study Areas (WSAs) and Wilderness Areas (No Action)) to 6,199,000 acres (including 1,209,000 acres within WSAs and Wilderness Areas (Alternative 3)). The Preferred Alternative proposed 6,077,000 acres of ACEC (including 1,209,000 acres within WSAs and Wilderness Areas).

The Draft DRECP also proposed Conservation and Management Actions (CMAs) to manage ACECs. CMAs included various resource use limitations. The Draft DRECP included 147 ACECs. Of these, 58 were newly proposed ACECs, and 89 were existing. The alternatives considered a range of footprints and CMAs for both existing and newly proposed ACECs. Maps of each ACEC were included in Appendix L of the Draft DRECP. CMAs were listed in Volume II, with management specific to individual ACECs listed in Appendix L.

In March 2015, the DRECP Partner Agencies announced a phased approach to completing the DRECP. As part of the approach, the BLM component of the DRECP

(the LUPA) is being finalized first in Phase I, outlining important designations for conservation and renewable energy on public lands.

The Proposed DRECP LUPA would amend the CDCA Plan for the entire CDCA, and the RMPs for portions of the Bishop and Bakersfield Field Offices. This includes the Mojave Desert and Colorado/Sonoran Desert ecoregion subareas in California. The DRECP Plan Area includes all or a portion of the following counties: Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. The DRECP LUPA Area covers approximately 10,869,000 of BLM-administered lands. The Proposed LUPA also included six alternatives for the expansion, reduction, modification, and creation of ACECs. The 134 ACECs listed in this notice include all the ACECs identified within the range of alternatives analyzed in the Final EIS. Based on comments received on the Draft DRECP, the Proposed LUPA would designate 130 ACECs covering approximately 5,976,000 acres (including 1,101,000 acres within WSAs and Wilderness Areas) and includes CMAs and resource use limitations to manage those ACECs. Those 130 ACECs are a subset of the 134 listed below. The Proposed LUPA clarifies CMAs as they applied to the ACECs. It includes a detailed methodology for implementing and managing for ground disturbance caps in ACECs, including the addition of ground disturbance mitigation. As part of the Proposed LUPA, additional areas were moved into proposed conservation that were not included in the preferred alternative in the Draft EIS, including Silurian Valley, Cadiz Valley, the entirety of the Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area, the Palen-Ford cultural and sand resources areas. Some ACECs included in the Draft DRECP were combined with, or subsumed by other existing ACECs for manageability in the Proposed LUPA. Small amounts of acres were removed from the

ACECs to ensure that boundaries were manageable and enforceable, and to remove active mining areas from the ACECs in the Proposed LUPA.

The Notice of Availability for the DRECP Proposed LUPA and Final EIS was published on November 13, 2015, (80 FR 70254), which initiated a 30-day protest period. During the initial review of protest letters received, the BLM determined that it had missed a regulatory requirement, stated in 43 CFR 1610.7-2(b), to specifically list in a Federal Register Notice the proposed ACECs being considered. In order to fulfill this regulatory requirement, the BLM is releasing this NOA to identify the 134 ACECs and associated resource use limitations considered in the Proposed LUPA/Final EIS, and providing an additional 60-day public comment period on those ACECs.

The BLM accepted and considered input from the public on ACEC values and potential designation during scoping for the LUPA, during public comment on the Description and Comparative Evaluation of Draft DRECP Alternatives published in December 2012, and during the five-month comment period on the Draft DRECP LUPA and EIR/EIS. The alternatives analyzed in the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS varied in number and size of potential ACECs as discussed above.

The BLM then considered comments on the Draft DRECP in the development of the DRECP Proposed LUPA and Final EIS. Of the ACECs analyzed in the draft plan, the Proposed LUPA would designate 130 of the 134 area listed below as ACECs with their associated management and resource use limitations. The remaining four areas identified as potential ACECs were determined to not be appropriate for designation at this time. Resource use limitations were included in Volume II and Appendix L of the Draft

DRECP. The BLM considered public comments received during the comment period and refined the CMAs included in the Proposed LUPA.

Special Unit Management Plans were developed specific for each ACEC and are contained in Appendix L of the DRECP Proposed LUPA and Final EIS. The BLM evaluated each proposed and existing ACEC within the DRECP to determine if special management was needed for the following resources and uses:

- Soil, water, air;
- Vegetation – including special status species;
- Fish and wildlife – including special status species;
- Cultural resources;
- Paleontology;
- Trails and travel management;
- Recreation;
- Land tenure;
- Rights of way;
- Minerals (including locatable minerals, mineral materials, and non-energy leasables); and
- Wild horses and burros.

Where special management, including resource use limitations, is proposed for a specific ACEC, it is identified in that unit's Special Unit Management Plan.

The proposed resource use limitations for all ACECs listed below include limitations on ground disturbing activities. Ground disturbing activities in ACECs would be constrained by specified disturbance caps, which limit the total ground disturbance in the

area. The specific ACEC disturbance caps were first disclosed in the Draft DRECP LUPA, are defined in the individual Special Unit Management Plans (Appendix L for the Draft DRECP LUPA and Proposed LUPA/Final EIS), and range from 1.0 percent to 0.1 percent. The methodology for applying the disturbance caps is listed in CMAs ACEC-DIST-1 through ACEC-DIST-3 in Section II.3.4 of the Proposed DRECP LUPA/Final EIS.

Other resource use limitations include limitations on rights-of-way (including prohibition of renewable energy activities and right-of-way avoidance or exclusion for all other rights-of-way), specific design features and mitigation measures to protect cultural and biological resources. These CMAs are listed in Section II.3.4.2.2 and II.3.4.2.4 of the Proposed LUPA/Final EIS.

The DRECP Proposed LUPA includes the following ACECs (note that acreage figures are rounded to the nearest 1000, 100, or 10, as appropriate) (due to rounding and designation overlap, columns do not sum to the total acreage figures discussed above):

Proposed ACEC	Acres (No Action)	Acres (Proposed LUPA)	Relevant and Important Values
Afton Canyon	8,800	8,800	Hydrologic and geologic features, paleontological resources, cultural values, wildlife resources
Alligator Rock	6,800	6,800	Cultural values
Amargosa North	7,100	115,900	Wildlife resources, plant assemblages, riparian resources, cultural values (includes portions of the existing Amargosa River ACEC)
Amargosa South	19,500	147,900	Wildlife resources, plant assemblages, riparian resources, cultural values (includes portions of the

			existing Amargosa River ACEC)
Amboy Crater National Natural Area	600	600	Plant assemblage
Avawatz Mountains Wilderness Study Area	0	49,800	Wildlife resources
Ayers Rock	0	1,600	Cultural values
Barstow Carbonate Endemic Plants Research Natural Area	4,400	5,000	Vegetative resources, wildlife resources
Barstow Woolly Sunflower	19,100	19,100	Vegetative resources, wildlife resources
Bedrock Spring	800	800	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Bendire's Thrasher	11,700	9,800	Wildlife resources (portions of existing ACEC are proposed to be managed as part of the Jawbone/Butterbrecht ACEC)
Big Morongo Canyon	24,900	24,900	Wildlife and vegetative resources, cultural values, riparian resources
Big Rock Creek Wash	0	300	Geologic features, vegetative resources, wildlife resources
Bigelow Cholla	100	4,400	Wildlife and vegetative resources
Black Mountain Cultural Area	51,300	51,300	Cultural values, wildlife and vegetative resources
Brisbane Valley Monkey Flower	0	11,700	Vegetative resources
Bristol Mountains	0	214,200	Wildlife resources, plant assemblages, cultural values
Cadiz Valley	0	190,800	Wildlife resources, unique plant assemblages
Cady Mountains Wilderness Study Area	0	101,400	Wildlife resources
Calico Early Man Site	800	800	Cultural values
Caliente Creek Area of Ecological	0	0	Wildlife resources (Note - this area is being identified as important for wildlife, but not

Importance			as an ACEC in the Proposed LUPA)
Castle Mountain	0	22,900	Unique plant assemblage, wildlife resources, cultural values
Cerro Gordo-Conglomerate Mesa	9,000	12,100	Cultural values, rare plant and animal species and habitat
Cerro Gordo Wilderness Study Area	0	600	Cultural values, desert wildlife species
Chemehuevi	818,900	875,400	Wildlife resources, usual plant assemblages, cultural values
Christmas Canyon	3,400	3,400	Cultural values
Chuckwalla	493,600	514,400	Cultural values, scenic values, vegetative and wildlife resources
Chuckwalla to Chemehuevi Tortoise Linkage	0	319,900	Wildlife resources, cultural values
Chuckwalla Valley Dune Thicket	2,200	2,200	Vegetation resources, cultural values
Clark Mountain	4,300	0	The majority of this ACEC is now within the Mojave National Preserve. Lands outside the Preserve are proposed to be managed within the Ivanpah ACEC.
Coachella Valley Fringe-toad Lizard	10,300	10,300	Unique geologic features, wildlife resources, cultural values
Coolgardie Mesa	9,800	9,800	Vegetative resources
Corn Springs	2,500	2,500	Cultural values, hydrologic features, wildlife and vegetation resources
Coyote Mountains Fossil Site	5,900	5,900	Geologic features, paleontological resources, wildlife resources, cultural values
Crater Mountain Wilderness Study Area	0	1,000	Wildlife resources

Cronese Basin	8,500	8,500	Cultural values
Dagget Ridge Monkey Flower	26,000	26,000	Vegetative resources
Dead Mountains	27,200	27,200	Cultural values
Death Valley Wilderness Study Area	0	47,900	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Denning Springs	400	400	Cultural values
Desert Lily Preserve	2,100	2,100	Vegetative resources
Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area	22,200	22,200	Wildlife resources
Dos Palmas	8,300	8,300	Unique geologic features, wildlife and fish resources, cultural values
Eagles Flyway	0	11,000	Wildlife resources
East Mesa	42,100	88,500	Cultural values, wildlife resources
El Paso to Golden Valley Wildlife	0	57,900	Wildlife resources, geologic features, vegetative resources
Fossil Falls	1,600	1,600	Wildlife resources, prehistoric and historic cultural values, unique geological features
Fremont- Kramer	311,500	310,200	Wildlife resources
Granite Mountain Wildlife Linkage	0	39,300	Wildlife resources, plant assemblages
Great Falls Basin Argus Range Wilderness Study Area	0	10,300	Wildlife resources
Halloran Wash	1,700	1,700	Cultural values
Harper Dry Lake	500	500	Riparian resources, wildlife resources
Horse Canyon	1,500	1,500	Cultural values, paleontological resources, vegetative resources
Independence Creek Wilderness Study Area	0	6,800	Wildlife resources

Indian Pass	1,900	1,900	Cultural values, vegetative resources
Ivanpah	35,000	78,300	Wildlife resources, cultural values
Jawbone/ Butterbrecht	147,800	153,200	Wildlife resources, cultural values, vegetative resources
Juniper Flats Cultural Area	2,400	2,400	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Kelso Creek Monkeyflower	1,900	1,900	Vegetative resources
Kingston Range	18,900	18,900	Wildlife and vegetative resources, cultural values
Kingston Range Wilderness Study Area	0	40,000	Wildlife resources
Lake Cahuilla	14,000	8,600	Cultural values
Last Chance Canyon	5,100	5,100	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Manix Paleontological Area	2,900	2,900	Paleontological resources, cultural values, wildlife resources
Manzanar	0	500	Cultural values
Marble Mountain Fossil Bed	200	200	Geologic features, paleontological resources
McCoy Valley	0	26,200	Wildlife resources
McCoy Wash	0	6,400	Plant assemblage, wildlife resources
Mesquite Hills/ Crucero	5,000	5,000	Cultural values
Mesquite Lake	6,700	6,700	Cultural values
Middle Knob	17,800	17,800	Vegetative resources
Mojave Fishhook Cactus	600	600	Vegetative resources
Mojave Fringe- toad Lizard	22,200	22,400	Wildlife and vegetative resources
Mojave Ground Squirrel	0	198,600	Wildlife and vegetative resources
Mopah Spring	1,900	1,900	Wildlife resources, cultural values
Mountain Pass Dinosaur Trackway	600	600	Paleontological resources
Mule McCoy Linkage	0	51,500	Wildlife resources, plant assemblage, cultural values
Mule Mountains	4,100	4,100	Wildlife resources

North Algodones Dunes	0	0	During the DRECP process, this ACEC designation was removed through the Imperial Sand Dunes Recreation Area (ISDRA) Management Plan ROD (June 2013). It is reflected in the range of alternatives. The Proposed LUPA would adopt the decision made in the ISDRA ROD.
Northern Lucerne Wildlife Linkage	0	21,900	Wildlife resources, plant assemblages
Ocotillo	0	14,600	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Olancha Greasewood	0	25,600	Unusual plant assemblage
Old Woman Springs Wildlife Linkage	0	56,000	Wildlife resources
Ord-Rodman	218,800	230,900	Wildlife resources
Owens Lake	0	10,300	Cultural values, wildlife and plant resources
Palen Dry Lake	0	3,600	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Palen Ford Playa Dunes	0	41,400	Playa/dune system, wildlife resources, cultural values
Panamint and Argus	0	125,500	Desert wetland communities, cultural values
Parish's Phacelia	500	500	Vegetative resources
Patton Military Camps	3800	16,500	Cultural values
Picacho	0	184,500	Wildlife and vegetative resources, cultural values
Pilot Knob	900	900	Cultural values
Pinto Mountains	110,000	110,000	Wildlife resources
Pipes Canyon	0	8,500	Cultural values
Pisgah Research Natural Area	18,100	42,100	Wildlife resources, plant assemblages
Piute-Fenner	151,900	155,700	Wildlife resources, cultural resources
Plank Road	300	300	Cultural values
Rainbow Basin/	4,100	4,100	Wildlife resources, geologic

Owl Canyon			features, paleontological resources
Red Mountain Spring	700	700	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Rodman Mountains Cultural Area	6,200	6,200	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Rose Spring	800	800	Cultural values
Saline Valley	1,400	1,400	Cultural values, wildlife resources, unique vegetation communities
Salt Creek Hills	2,200	2,200	Vegetation resources, riparian resources, cultural values
Salton Seas Hazardous	0	7,100	Public hazard
San Sebastian Marsh/ San Felipe Creek	6,500	6,500	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Sand Canyon	2,600	2,600	Wildlife and vegetative resources, cultural values
Santos Manuel	0	27,500	Wildlife resources, cultural values
Shadow Valley	95,800	197,500	Wildlife resources, cultural values
Shoreline	11,600	35,800	Cultural values
Short Canyon	800	800	Wildlife and vegetative resources
Sierra Canyons	0	26,400	Cultural values, wildlife resources
Singer Geoglyphs	1,900	1,900	Cultural values, vegetative resources
Soda Mountain Expansion	0	16,700	Wildlife resources, cultural values
Soda Mountains Wilderness Study Area	0	88,800	Cultural values, wildlife and vegetative resources
Soggy Dry Lake Creosote Rings	200	200	Unusual plant assemblage
Southern Inyo Wilderness Study Area	0	2,900	Wildlife resources
Steam Well	40	40	Cultural values
Superior-Cronese	404,800	397,400	Wildlife resources
Surprise Canyon	4,600	4,600	Wildlife resources, riparian resources

Symmes Creek Wilderness Study Area	0	8,400	Wildlife resources, cultural values
Tehachapi Linkage	0	0	Wildlife resources (Note - this area is being identified as important for wildlife, but not as an ACEC in the Proposed LUPA.)
Trona Pinnacles National Natural Landmark	4,000	4,000	Unique geologic features, wildlife resources
Turtle Mountains	50,400	50,400	Wildlife resources
Upper Johnson Valley Yucca Rings	300	300	Unusual plant assemblage
Upper McCoy	0	37,300	Wildlife resources, cultural values, unusual plant assemblage
Warm Sulfur Springs	300	300	Desert marsh habitat, unique geologic and hydrologic features, cultural values
West Mesa	20,300	82,600	Wildlife resources, cultural values
West Paradise	200	200	Vegetative resources
Western Rand Mountains	31,100	30,300	Wildlife resources
Whipple Mountains	2,800	2,800	Geologic features, cultural values
White Mountain City	800	800	Cultural values
White Mountains Wilderness Study Area	0	8,800	Wildlife resources
Whitewater Canyon	14,000	14,000	Riparian resources, wildlife resources, scenic resources, cultural values
Yuha Basin	68,300	77,300	Cultural values, vegetative and wildlife resources

Copies of the DRECP Proposed LUPA/Final EIS are available for public inspection at the following locations:

- BLM California State Office, 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623, Sacramento, CA;

- BLM California Desert District Office, 22835 Calle San Juan De Los Lagos, Moreno Valley, CA 92553;
- BLM Barstow Field Office, 2601 Barstow Road, Barstow, CA 92311;
- BLM El Centro Field Office, 1661 S. 4th Street, El Centro, CA 92243;
- BLM Needles Field Office, 1303 S. Highway 95, Needles, CA 92363;
- BLM Palm Springs South Coast Field Office, 1201 Bird Center Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92262;
- BLM Ridgecrest Field Office, 300 S. Richmond Road, Ridgecrest, CA 93555;
- BLM Bakersfield Field Office, 3801 Pegasus Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93308; and
- BLM Bishop Field Office, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100, Bishop, CA 93514.

Before including your phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware that your entire comment letter – including your personal identifying information – may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

AUTHORITY: 43 CFR 1610.2, 43 CFR 1610.5, 43 CFR 1610.7-2(b)

Thomas Pogacnik

Deputy State Director, Bureau of Land Management

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