

CALIFORNIA DESERT COALITION
P.O. Box 1508, YUCCA VALLEY, CA 92286
WWW.CADESERTCO.ORG INFO@CADESERTCO.ORG



May 20, 2013

California Energy Commission
Dockets Office, MS-4
Docket No. 09-RENEW EO-01
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512
docket@energy.ca.gov

SUBJECT: Description and Comparative Evaluation of Draft DRECP Alternatives of December 17, 2012, and DRECP Shapefiles of December 20, 2012

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the subject documents. The California Desert Coalition (CDC) is a nonpartisan, issue advocacy group organized as a committee of The SummerTree Institute, a 501(c)(3) nonprofit corporation.

CDC supports renewable energy production and utilization in California as long as it protects unique and sensitive resources, in particular the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA), and respects the rights of citizens who live in this conservation area.

Previously, the CDC submitted comments on July 25, 2012, and January 23, 2013. Those comments will not be reiterated here; the following are additional comments.

Variance lands must be eliminated from the DRECP

Variance lands were introduced outside of the environmental evaluation of the renewable energy development focus areas (DFAs) sited in the DRECP boundary area and have not been sufficiently analyzed in this process. The public therefore is uninformed about their value and need. Variance lands should not be included.

Consider EPA-Recommended Alternatives to Remote, Utility-Scale Renewable Energy Development on Public Lands

Viable alternatives to remote, utility scale renewable energy development on public lands have been proposed by the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) but ignored in the DRECP. In its [RE-powering America's Lands Initiative](#), the EPA recommends siting renewable energy on potentially contaminated lands, landfills, and mine sites. The fact that no discussion of the EPA reports cited below has been included in the DRECP underscores that the EPA's energy siting criteria have not been followed.

- EPA's "[Best Practices for Siting Solar Photovoltaics on Municipal Solid Waste Landfills, February 2013](#)" (but a draft was available in July 2012), states, "EPA has screened more than 11,000 potentially contaminated sites and MSW landfills — covering nearly 15 million acres across the United States — for suitability to site renewable energy generation facilities, including utility-scale solar." EPA identified several benefits of locating solar photovoltaic facilities on these sites, noting that these sites:
 - Generally are located near existing roads and energy transmission or distribution infrastructure
 - May reduce the environmental impacts of energy systems
 - Can be developed in place of limited open space, preserving the land as a carbon sink and/or for other ecosystem services

EPA further noted that MSW landfills are particularly well-suited for solar development because they are

- Located near critical infrastructure, including electric transmission lines and roads
- Located near areas with high energy demand (e.g., large population bases)

- Constructed with large areas of minimal grade
 - Offered at lower land costs when compared to open space
 - Able to accommodate net metered or utility scale projects.
- As part of EPA's RE-Powering America's Land Initiative, the "[Renewable Energy Projects on Potentially Contaminated Lands, Landfills, and Mine Sites](#)," report of October 2012 documents the development of 184 MW of renewable energy on the 15 million acres referred to in the EPA's best practices document above.

National Conservation Lands (NCLs) should be maximized

When the [Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009](#) was made into law, it established the National Lands Conservation System (NLCS), which is made up of BLM lands with significant resources for conservation properties (identified as National Conservation Lands (NCLs)).

In the DRECP, a proposed NCL may shrink or expand when weighed with different criteria. The intention of the Act of 2009 was that land with significant conservation resources, features which are static, be included in the NLCS. But in the DRECP, weighing of criteria artificially accommodates different renewable energy outcomes for individual alternatives, so resources identified as worthy of NCL status are lost in one alternative and "found" in another alternative. If the boundaries of those lands with significant resources are adjusted to fit different alternatives, then effectively conservation properties are forced out of existence on paper. The practice of that forced loss must be eliminated from the DRECP; NCL boundaries should be maintained and maximized throughout all the alternatives.

As an example, Alternative 2 has extensive NCLs and ACECs in the Morongo Basin. However, in other alternatives these ACECs are identified as NCLs. Thus the ACECs in Alternative 2 need to be designated as NCLs, since they obviously qualify for that status as determined in other alternatives. Further, note that the Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009 specifies the components to be included in the NLCS, and one of these components is stated as "public land within the California Desert Conservation Area administered by the Bureau of Land Management for conservation purposes." It appears then that any land designated as an ACEC, i.e., an area of critical environmental concern, should be considered to be administered by the BLM for conservation purposes.

In Summary

1. Variance lands should be eliminated.
2. EPA renewable energy siting criteria should be followed.
3. NCLs should be maximized to include all lands that fit the criteria to be included in the NLCS.

In conclusion, after further consideration, we most emphatically cannot endorse any of the six alternatives in their present form.

Respectfully,



Ruth Rieman, Vice Chair
California Desert Coalition
P.O. Box 1508
Yucca Valley, CA 92286
info@cadertco.org
www.cadertco.org