

January 23, 2013

To the California Energy Commission **regarding Docket # 09-RENEW EO-01**

As a resident of the Morongo Basin and San Bernardino County I have a great investment in the outcome of the DRECP. In my role as a citizen, not a scientist, I have several general comments to make, especially regarding my great concern about the “variance lands.” Two organizations of which I am a Board member have submitted more detailed comments, the California Desert Coalition and the Morongo Basin Conservation Association.

My first concern is that permitting Development Focus Areas for large-scale projects anywhere in and bordering the Morongo Basin is not acceptable. Such development would reduce the value of the conserved land and scenic vistas that provide the underpinning of the tourism industry on which our region thrives. Surrounding and threading through the Morongo Basin are Joshua Tree National Park, Mojave National Monument, Wildlands Conservancy, Pioneertown Mountains Preserve, the proposed Mojave Trails and Sand to Snow National Monuments, and more than 1500 of acres of threatened desert ecosystems through the Mojave Desert Land Trust based in Joshua Tree. These open “Western” lands with unspoiled views have an iconic history, and bring national and international visitors to the Basin, providing much-needed employment for hundreds in our small region. Visitors may marvel at the acres of wind towers in the lower desert along I-10, but once they drive north over the Morongo Grade, they expect peaceful rural Western views, not more towers of any kind.

Another concern is the appearance in the December Draft of so many “variance lands.” It is my understanding that many of these areas have not been appropriately evaluated for conservation elements and therefore their inclusion has evaded the depth of scientific and environmental scrutiny that is supposed to be the basis of these DRECP decisions.

And finally, in the larger picture, the necessity of large-scale solar to meet California’s green energy needs is far less than is being touted through this process. The large-scale plants should be limited to disturbed lands, not placed on public lands just because of the lower cost. Government time, effort, and resources should - all along - have been put toward small scale and rooftop distributed renewable energy production. Frankly, it boggles my mind to think how far along we might be on the *right* kind of renewable energy, if even half of the meeting time and paperwork time that has been spent on the DRECP would have been focused on developing small scale and rooftop solar in California. I continue to be astonished at how far ahead of us Germany is with so much less sunshine, because they recognized the right kind of incentives and made the most of it.

Please do not allow any land designations in the DRECP that permit large-scale renewable energy projects, including Development Focus Areas and Variance Lands.

Sincerely,

Laraine Turk
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Joshua Tree, CA

cc: San Bernardino County Supervisor James Ramos