



## DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

### Questions and Answers Regarding the DRECP Preliminary Conservation Strategy October 26, 2011

#### **1. What is the PCS and what is its purpose?**

The Preliminary Conservation Strategy (PCS) and supporting maps are an initial look at how the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan's (DRECP) renewable energy development goals and habitat conservation goals may be achieved using natural community and conservation planning tools. Using the PCS as a specific point of reference, the Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT) agencies seek input from the DRECP Stakeholder Committee and other interested members of the public about what alternative reserve designs; renewable energy focus areas; plan structures; biological goals and objectives; and mitigation measures should be developed and evaluated during the development of the draft DRECP.

The PCS is not a draft of the DRECP or a proposed conservation strategy. It does not include the components of a completed draft NCCP/HCP, and it is not intended to propose or prescribe the type or extent of renewable energy projects that will be covered in the DRECP or the reserve design that will be proposed in the draft DRECP. Instead, the PCS is an early look at how the DRECP could be designed and structured and is intended for stakeholders and others to provide feedback to the REAT agencies regarding key elements of the DRECP. This feedback will allow the REAT agencies to move forward with developing the DRECP with a better understanding of the goals and trade-offs likely needed to complete the plan.

#### **2. What information was used to draft the PCS?**

The PCS includes 1) a PCS map and 2) Renewable Energy Study Areas (RESAs).

Information used to develop the PCS map is summarized in Tables 2.1-1 and 2.1-2 of the PCS and includes over 30 biological elements, including landscape/ecological process elements, natural community elements, and 16 species elements. Appendix A-1 of the PCS provides a detailed description of the metadata used to develop the PCS map.

Information used to develop the RESAs is described in Section 4.3 of the PCS and includes solar, wind, geothermal, and transmission data. "Unconstrained" renewable energy resources data (i.e., not refined by development potential) were considered along with renewable resource data refined by consideration of siting criteria and other factors related to development potential. These factors included items such as biological resource

conflicts, slope, land use constraints (such as military lands, and legally and legislatively protected lands), preliminary transmission considerations, and other factors.

### **3. What does it mean if a proposed project is located in an area identified as a “Moderate to High Biological Value”?**

The PCS map is not a reserve design or a conservation strategy and as such is not driven by or based on a defined set of covered activities or biological goals and objectives, as will be included in the DRECP. The primary element of the PCS is the PCS map, which was developed by the REAT agencies. The PCS map synthesizes available physical, biological, and land use data to create key land categories that can be used to discuss and develop alternative reserve designs.

The PCS map is not intended to have a regulatory effect or to govern how projects are reviewed under CEQA, NEPA, or regulatory permitting processes during preparation of the DRECP. Instead the PCS map is a point of reference for stakeholder comments regarding alternative conservation strategies and assumptions regarding renewable energy development, which will be used to develop and analyze alternative conservation strategies, culminating in the selection of a draft preferred conservation and implementation strategy. The REAT agencies recognize that maps will undergo significant refinement in the alternative conservation strategies prior to completion of the DRECP. The maps are summarized in Table 2.14-1 of the PCS.

### **4. What Biological Goals and Objectives were used to develop the PCS map and why?**

The biological elements of the PCS do not represent all of the biological factors to be considered in the DRECP conservation strategy. In particular, the PCS biological elements do not include all of the landscape elements, natural communities, and proposed covered species under consideration for the DRECP, for which DRECP NCCP/HCP goals and objectives will still need to be developed.

The biological elements considered in the PCS and represented on the map do, however, offer the opportunity to advance consideration of the structure and content of goals and objectives to be developed for the DRECP NCCP/HCP conservation strategy. Initial concepts for DRECP NCCP/HCP goals and objectives were presented in the DRECP Framework Conservation Strategy Report (Section III) and have been further discussed with stakeholders during March 9, 2011 and August 16, 2011 Stakeholder Committee presentations as part of the iterative process of working with stakeholders to develop goals and objectives for the DRECP. Working examples of goals and objectives are included in

the PCS based on the biological elements considered by the REAT agencies in development of the PCS map. These working examples are described and presented in detail in the PCS.

**5. What does it mean if there are known biological resources of importance within areas identified as Renewable Energy Study Areas (RESAs)?**

The RESAs are intended to identify areas where there is a high potential for renewable energy development and there are relatively fewer biological constraints. They are not intended to delineate areas where biological resources are not present or where projects could be constructed without regard to biological resource impacts. The REAT agencies recognize that there are likely to be biological resources in RESAs and that appropriate avoidance, minimization and mitigation measures would be required for projects in such areas. However, the REAT agencies intend to identify in the DRECP areas within which there are fewer biological conflicts, where review of proposed renewable energy projects could be expedited. To that end, the REAT agencies have preliminarily identified the PCS RESAs for further study and discussion.

**6. To what extent might the PCS maps change in the future?**

The PCS is based on an initial evaluation of conservation needs of a partial list of likely covered species (16). It has not incorporated DRECP program and biological goals and objectives, or physical processes that affect conservation or development. It has not yet benefited from a Marxan analysis to assist in the reserve design or fully considered other potentially conflicting land uses, such as cultural resources, recreation or mineral extraction. Also, the REAT agencies are still determining what the specific renewable energy goals should be for the DRECP. For all of these reasons and others, the maps used in the DRECP will likely be substantially different in many respects.

**7. How will stakeholder comments on the PCS be used to inform the development of the draft DRECP?**

The REAT agencies, working with the DRECP Stakeholder Committee and others, intend to develop several draft conservation strategy alternatives for evaluation and, ultimately, selection of a preferred alternative for the DRECP. The conservation strategy alternatives development process will include evaluation of the level of contribution of the DRECP to the overall regional reserve design based on the conservation strategy developed to address DRECP covered species and communities. Stakeholder comments on the PCS will help the REAT agencies develop those alternatives. In particular, the REAT agencies seek comments on alternative reserve designs, renewable energy study areas, renewable energy development goals, biological goals and objectives, alternative plan structures, and mitigation measures for renewable energy projects.

**8. What are the next steps in the development of the DRECP?**

Immediate next steps in the process include stakeholder review of the PCS and independent scientific review of the proposed covered species and other aspects of the biological elements. Near-term steps include development of alternative conservation strategies, selection of a preferred conservation strategy, and preparation of the draft DRECP preliminary conservation strategy, as shown in the DRECP work process diagram found on the DRECP website ([www.drecp.org](http://www.drecp.org)). Specific next steps are discussed in greater detail in Sections 6 and 7 of the PCS.