

DRAFT

October 26, 2011

DRECP Preliminary Conservation Strategy

6. SUMMARY APPROACH TO SCIENCE INPUT FOR DRECP

Note to Reader: This section is based on the DRECP Science Input memorandum dated May 10, 2011.

6.1 Process for Soliciting Additional Expert Input

The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) includes a practical and integrated approach to science input and consists of the following steps:

- “Front-loading” the Natural Community Conservation Plan/Habitat Conservation Plan (NCCP/HCP) development process with sound scientific input, accomplished by establishing the independent science advisor (ISA) group and delivery of the ISA report at the outset of the conservation planning process;
- Integrating ISA input and guidance in DRECP work products and documenting such integration in the Framework Conservation Strategy Report (FCSR) and Preliminary Conservation Strategy (PCS);
- Obtaining scientific review by external experts that have been selected by Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT) staff on specific interim work products such as the species accounts, habitat distribution model parameters and models, description of ecological processes, conservation gap analysis, biological goals and objectives, conservation strategies, and other work products;
- Seeking input from scientists during development and review of the PCS; and
- Convening a DRECP science review workshop in early 2012. This workshop will be organized and facilitated by an external scientist familiar with the development of conservation plans. The schedule, format, and participants will be determined in concert with REAT agencies.

Background

Input from the scientific community is an important and required component in the preparation of regional NCCP/HCPs. The NCCP Act requires that NCCP planning agreements “...establish a process for the inclusion of independent scientific input to assist the department and plan participants...” to help devise scientifically sound conservation strategies, reserve design principles, a monitoring and adaptive management framework, and to identify key data gaps and uncertainties. To accomplish this, scientific input is often sought as early as possible during plan preparation.

DRAFT

October 26, 2011

DRECP Preliminary Conservation Strategy

To meet this requirement, an ISA group was assembled early in the DRECP planning process. The ISA group met on April 22 and April 23, 2010, and produced a final ISA Recommendations Report in October 2010. Because the ISA group met early in the DRECP process, there were a limited number of draft work products that they were able to consider (e.g., Plan Area boundary, Planning Agreement). As a result, they provided input primarily on topics that the DRECP was about to address, including Covered Species, permit duration, natural communities, and Covered Activities. In addition, they provided general feedback on other topics, such as ways to address information gaps and uncertainties, principles for reserve design, and principles for adaptive management and monitoring.

During development of the DRECP, the consultant team and the stakeholders frequently refer to the ISA report and input is incorporated into the Plan. In addition, the consultant team has significant scientific resources available, both in-house and from staff within the REAT agencies. However, because the Plan has progressed significantly beyond what the ISA group reviewed, continuing to pursue scientific input would help ensure that the Plan incorporates the highest-quality information available. Additional external scientific review would be solicited and incorporated into the DRECP in two ways—review by external experts and by a scientific review panel.

6.2 Review by External Experts

Many significant work products that would benefit from external scientific review are in preparation. For example, the species profiles contain summaries of the latest scientific data on the Covered Species that are relevant to the Plan (Appendix B). These accounts were reviewed internally by experts on the consulting team, but they would also benefit from external peer review by experts. Because there are many species profiles and many species experts, the REAT agencies will obtain this external scientific review by requesting that individual scientists review one or more species profiles. . Over the past few months, scientific experts from a wide variety of disciplines have been contacted and asked to provide their expertise on the Covered Species distribution, ecology, and species-specific conservation issues, as well as on species habitat modeling, vegetation mapping, wildlife movement, sand transport systems, climate change, invasive species management, and monitoring techniques. The REAT agencies will select independent reviewers based on their expertise regarding species and species groups included in the preliminary list of Covered Species. The selected reviewers will conduct their analysis independently and provide their feedback directly to the REAT agencies.

DRAFT

October 26, 2011

DRECP Preliminary Conservation Strategy

6.3 Scientific Review Workshop

The REAT agencies plan to convene a scientific review workshop in early 2012 to provide additional scientific review and input on key biological components of the DRECP conservation strategy. Participation in the scientific review workshop would be organized and assisted by an independent scientist. Presentations at the workshop and feedback from participating scientists would be open to the public. Depending on the timing of the scientific review workshop, some biological components for the conservation strategy that would likely be available and appropriate for discussion and input at the workshop include:

- Reserve design methods;
- Monitoring and adaptive management; and
- Climate change.

The REAT agencies may also ask participants in the workshop to provide input on both general and specific conservation challenges facing the DRECP.