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



Re: Draft Renewable Energy Conservation Plan and Draft Statement/Environmental Impact Report

Dear Commissioners:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the DRECP draft. I respectfully request consideration of several components of the September 2014 DRECP draft.

**Adaptive Management** – The Independent Science Panels convened in 2010 and 2012 state “*a well-designed Adaptive Management Plan is the most critical element of a successful DRECP. The need to establish current baseline conditions for Before/After Control Impact (BACI) sampling designs underscores the urgency of initiating monitoring as soon as possible.*” (Independent Science Review for the DRECP, November 2012, iv) The baseline science studies including accurate mapping need to be established before the plan is enacted.

A budget, processes and management responsibilities needs to be defined. Given the current state of the BLM – unfilled positions, increasing workload and inherent workload anticipated by the implementation of the DRECP, a budget that clearly defines funding for implementation and maintenance needs to be defined before the plan is finalized. The plan purports to rely on state and federal funding and grants. It is unclear how the aforementioned funding mechanisms may be obtained without a baseline draft budget for at least the initial implementation.

**Impact on Natural Resources** Data analyzing the true impact of industrial sized projects is just beginning to be compiled. We hear of controls, like dust control, that are not working on the projects currently under construction or installed.

Recent local renewable energy projects offer firsthand information about the amount of water required during construction.

Water impacts from solar projects in the Morongo Basin, San Bernardino County:

- 3 solar projects (270AC) construction use: 35,189,532 gal/108AF
- 108AF supports 430+ desert households (@ .25AF per family f 2.3 avg.)
- 2014 Morongo Basin Pipeline water allocation = 982AF
- 11% of Morongo Basin Pipeline allocation was diverted for solar installation use

( Data provided by California Desert Coalition, 2014)

Extrapolating from the above figures to the 177,000 AC of planned disturbance  $270 \text{ AC}/108\text{AF} = 2.5 \text{ AF}/\text{AC}$  of drinking quality water  $1.5 \text{ AF}/\text{AC} \times 177,000 \text{ AC} = 442,500 \text{ AF}$  or 144,189,258,611 gallons of drinking quality water to develop solar in the PA, enough to support 1,770,000 families (.25AF per family). Local residents that rely on already stressed aquifers and uncertain deliveries from the State Water Project are concerned.

The actual amounts of water used to mitigate dust are much greater than the projected amounts and the dust is still not controlled. Impacts on wildlife, especially migrating birds should be monitored. True financial costs of projects should be compiled. True impact on our limited resources should be tracked. There are preliminary figures on efficiency, water and gas use of recently constructed utility scale projects. These impacts should be factored into alternatives and REAT's recommendations.

Reconsider **Distributed Energy Alternative**: The alternative was not brought forward partially because local governments were deemed to be ill prepared to manage.

“Permitting new renewable energy projects can also be challenging. Some cities and counties are pursuing renewable energy systems while others are not prepared to review or approve local renewable generation. Many cities and counties do not consider renewable energy in the planning codes and the requirements, permit fees, and local government expertise vary widely between jurisdictions, causing inefficiencies and increased costs. Local governments cited a lack of funds and time to update codes to address local renewable energy and the difficulty in keeping pace with the rapid development of local renewable technologies. Emergency responder representatives also discussed the challenge of understanding local renewables and new and emerging technologies.” (Vol. II of VI II.8-8)

San Bernardino County is in the process of updating the General Plan and development codes to permit renewable energy projects. The County recently expressed interest and a willingness to pursue microgrids and community solar at the special meeting held to vet staff comments on the DRECP. Since the majority of the plan lands lie within San Bernardino County, their ability and willingness to help manage the Distributed Energy Alternative should merit consideration.

Emergency responders will find the understanding of local renewables no more difficult than adapting to newer technologies in automobiles. Emergency personnel easily incorporated new procedures for safely treating patients in vehicles equipped with airbags vs vehicles without airbags – disconnect the battery before placing themselves in front of un-deployed airbags. Local renewables will not pose any greater challenges to understand than any other emerging technologies, like electronic autos or cellular towers.

All of the current DRECP draft alternatives represent out dated technology. Even renewable energy industry leaders are headed away from utility scale RE on large undisturbed tracks of land. David Crane, NRG Energy's CEO states in his letter to his shareholders in March of 2014. (NRG Energy is a significant partner in the Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System.)

*“Just a few years ago the prevailing wisdom was that the path to a clean energy economy depended on our collective willingness to build a nationwide, high voltage transmission system in order to transport electricity in vast quantities from the relentlessly windy and brutally sunny parts of the country, where people generally don't live, to the more moderate places where Americans tend to congregate. The folly of that idea thankfully was realized before anyone actually began to build such an expensive and pointless white elephant. Now we are headed for the same goal BUT in the opposite direction: down the path towards a distributed generation-centric, clean energy future featuring individual choice and the empowerment of the American energy consumer.”*

To truly adaptively manage the DRECP, outdated technologies should not be the sole consideration simply because they fulfill the objective of streamlining permitting of utility scale projects on public lands.

**Phased Plan Implementation** – In order to Adaptively Manage the plan, take advantage of developing technologies and define and refine responsibilities and financing, phased implementation is the only reasonable approach. A phased implementation will allow refinement of DFA's to prevent conflict with identified areas with high conservation values and wildlife corridors. It would allow the agencies and stakeholders to further study areas of the desert that we currently do not have enough scientific data to make informed management decisions about as stated by the ISP. A phased implementation will allow for the addition of scientific expertise as recommended by the ISP. Currently the executive summary says it will "facilitate" the addition of scientific expertise and doesn't detail who will fund or how the expertise will be added to the management of the plan.

**Eliminate Variance Lands/Refine DFA's** – To accommodate 20,000 megawatts of large-scale renewable energy in the desert, the DRECP designates over 2 million acres of DFAs. However, the DRECP purposefully inflates the number of DFA acres because it anticipates that ultimately not every single acre of the DFAs will be available to renewable energy developers. The DRECP expects that renewable energy companies will be unable to develop some parts of the DFAs because of local permitting constraints, wildlife concerns, access to transmission, or other issues. The conservation goal of the plan is best achieved by refining the DFA's and eliminating variance lands to prevent conflict with wildlife corridors. 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.

**Calculate Economic Impacts:** The economic impacts on local communities should be considered. A recently published National Park Service report shows that 1,396,117 visitors to Joshua Tree National Park in 2012 spent \$62,175,800 in communities near the park. That spending supported 770 jobs in the area.

The University of Idaho's 2010 study of Joshua Tree National Park visitors showed that the most important factor in visiting the area is views without development (90% of respondents). Clean air (89%); natural quiet and sounds of nature (87%); desert plants (83%) and wildlife (81%) were other factors rated "extremely important. Over 1.3 million visitors visit the Joshua Tree National Park. Natural, undisturbed areas - the most important factors to visitors will be greatly impacted by industrial scale projects and potentially have an extreme effect on our businesses.

The park welcomed 1.6 million visitors in the 2014 calendar year – the increasing number of visitors will translate into increased economic benefit to local communities. Many of our businesses benefit directly and indirectly from tourism. If we obliterate natural view sheds, the number one reason for visitation, our economy will undoubtedly suffer.

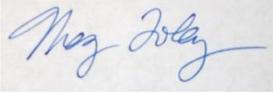
Community Plans developed by Morongo Valley, Joshua Tree and Homestead Valley express a strong desire for a rural lifestyle. Most residents moved to this area, or stay in the area, for the same reasons reflected in the JTNP Visitor Study. An economic benefit analysis, comparing property taxes paid to the State and County with industrial scale economic benefits should be part of the planning process. Given exemptions granted to large commercial developments and lack of local jobs, that residential development would provide more income for the State and County over the long haul.

**EPA's RE-Powering America's Land Initiative Not Incorporated.** The Environmental Protection Agency shows in this initiative that there are 15 million acres of degraded lands (contaminated lands,

landfills, and mine sites) across the United States that could be used to site renewable energy projects. The DRECP has not incorporated this important EPA work into its alternatives.

For the DRECP to fulfill its objectives it must consider existing State and Federal plans. It should incorporate the latest science by improving the species distribution models. Incorporation of the California Species of Special Concern and BLM Sensitive Species will better match the objective of being a long term planning tool.

Respectfully submitted,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Meg Foley", is placed over a light gray rectangular background.

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