

II.1 APPROACH TO DEVELOPING ALTERNATIVES

The conservation and renewable energy planning processes used to develop the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP or Plan) and Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) are described in detail in Volume I, Background and Planning Process, of this document. Those planning processes, together with stakeholder and public input gained through community outreach efforts including scoping, seven Tribal–Federal Leadership Conferences, and Bureau of Land Management (BLM)–Tribal government-to-government dialogue and consultation resulted in identification of a range of alternatives for consideration in the DRECP and EIR/EIS. Two broad categories of alternatives have been identified—those carried forward for detailed analysis in the DRECP and EIR/EIS and those not carried forward for detailed analysis. Both categories are summarized in this chapter.

II.1.1 Alternatives Carried Forward for Detailed Analysis

The alternatives carried forward for detailed analysis include a Preferred Alternative and four other action alternatives—Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 4. A No Action Alternative is also defined and carried forward for detailed analysis as required by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA). Each of these alternatives is described in this volume (Volume II) of the DRECP and EIR/EIS. DRECP Volume IV, Environmental Consequences/Effects Analysis, presents the detailed analysis of the environmental effects of each of these alternatives.

At the beginning of the description for each of the action alternatives (Preferred Alternative and Alternatives 1, 2, 3, and 4), a standard package of figures, tables, and charts is presented to orient the reader to the alternative and for equivalent representation and comparison of the alternatives.¹ This package includes Plan-wide descriptions of each alternative and descriptions of the following individual components of each alternative as described in Volume I: BLM Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA), California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP), and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) General Conservation Plan (GCP). Proposed incidental take permit applications under the GCP for the California Energy Commission (CEC) and the California State Lands Commission (CSLC) are contained in Appendix M. References in the DRECP to “component” or “components” refers to one or more of these parts of the DRECP—the LUPA, NCCP, GCP, or one of the take authorizations.

¹ Rounding of data was applied to raw values to avoid false precision when presenting calculated values. However, in presenting rounded values there were tradeoffs. Numerical data presented and analyzed in this volume comes from a variety of different sources with varying levels of precision in the data. For presentation purposes, the following general rounding rules were applied: values greater than 1,000 were rounded to nearest 1,000; values less than 1,000 and greater than 100 were rounded to the nearest 100; values of 100 or less were rounded to the nearest 10. Each value, including the totals and sub-totals, was independently rounded directly from the underlying source data. However, because totals and sub-totals were independently rounded they may not be the sum of the other constituent lower level table values.

For each of the action alternatives, this volume describes in detail the actions to be considered by the four Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT) agencies (BLM, USFWS, CDFW, CEC), CSLC, and potential future partners (e.g., California Public Utilities Commission, counties, private applicants) to approve and implement the DRECP, including the BLM LUPA, CDFW NCCP, and USFWS GCP. The geographic boundaries of each component of the DRECP are generally the same across all of the action alternatives, particularly those linked to ownership boundaries. However, within those categories and boundaries, the size and configuration of renewable energy development areas and reserve design areas within each component vary among the alternatives.

Exhibit II.1-1 schematically depicts the geographic coverage of the plan components common to all the action alternatives. The specifics for each component for each action alternative are described in detail in this volume and analyzed in detail in Volume IV of this document.

Action Alternatives

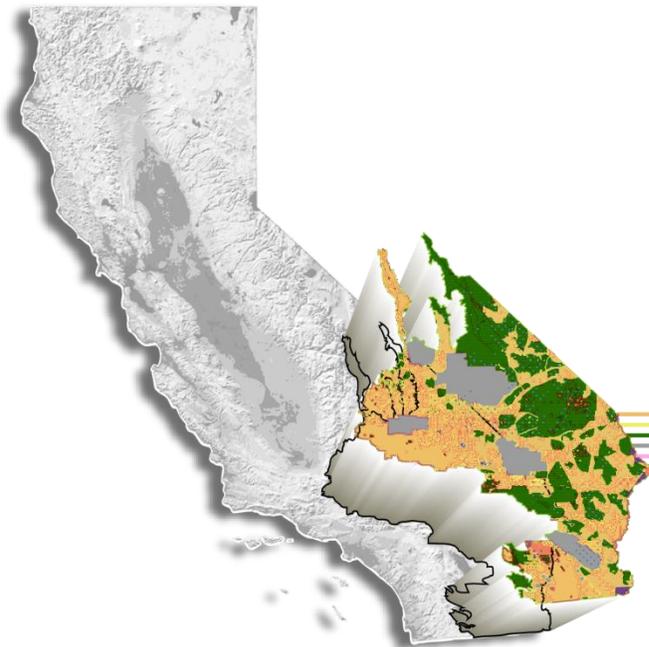
Each of the action alternatives incorporates a biological conservation strategy and Covered Activities elements. Differences among the action alternatives result from variations in the DRECP Plan-Wide Reserve Design Envelope and alternative-specific distributions of renewable energy technologies and configuration of the Development Focus Areas (DFAs).

For example, Alternative 1 includes a DFA configuration that includes only the lowest biological resource conflict areas. The DFA configuration in each of the other action alternatives includes the lowest biological resource conflict areas and additional areas with both high-value renewable energy resources and biological resource values. Each action alternative's DFA configuration reflects a different approach to balancing the goals of minimizing biological resource conflicts and maximizing opportunities to site renewable energy projects in areas of high-value renewable energy resources and to avoid or substantially lessen one or more significant effects of the DRECP. Compensation proposals embedded in the conservation strategies for the alternatives also reflect this process with Alternative 1 emphasizing avoidance, Alternative 2 emphasizing compensation, and the Preferred Alternative and Alternatives 3 and 4 representing variations between avoidance and compensation, all within the context of siting DFAs within areas of high-value renewable energy resources.

For each action alternative, a DRECP Plan-Wide Reserve Design Envelope and conservation strategy were developed to meet the requirements of the federal Endangered Species Act and the Natural Community Conservation Planning Act and to achieve the Step-Down Biological Objectives. The DRECP Plan-Wide Reserve Design Envelope for each action alternative reflects a different approach for achieving the Step-Down Biological Objectives, based on the DFA configuration for each alternative and alternative avoidance and compensation strategies. It is also important to note that each alternative DFA configuration was designed to a large extent around areas of low biological conflict, so the DFA configurations themselves are part of the DRECP Plan-Wide Reserve Design Envelope.

Components of the DRECP

Implementation of the DRECP will involve the Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT) agencies (BLM, CDFW, CEC, USFWS) and other existing and potential partners (CSLC, California Public Utilities Commission, counties, private applicants). Various actions will need to be taken by the REAT agencies and other partners with regard to Covered Activities, some involving overlapping geographic areas and jurisdictions. As described in detail in Volumes I and II, actions addressed in the DRECP include the following: BLM Land Use Amendment (LUPA), CDFW Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP), and USFWS General Conservation Plan (GCP), including CEC and CSLC permit applications. This chart geographically depicts the relationships among these actions. For a depiction of the geographic boundaries of the individual actions, please see the individual maps indicated at right.



LLPA Lands

Legislatively & Legally Protected Areas
 Total Acreage: 7,567,000

The DRECP does not directly affect the existing management activities of LLPA lands.

LUPA Lands

Land Use Plan Amendment
 Agency: Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
 Total Acreage: 9,834,000

NCCP Lands

Natural Communities Conservation Plan
 Agency: California Dept. of Fish & Wildlife (CDFW)
 Total Acreage: 18,986,000

GCP Lands

General Conservation Plan
 Agency: US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS)
 Total Acreage: 5,420,000

Other Lands

Military

Agency: US Department of Defense (DOD)
 Total Acreage: 3,019,000

The DRECP does not directly affect the existing management activities of military lands.

Maps on this chart schematically portray the relationships among the DRECP assembly components and are not intended to depict in detail ownerships or overlaps among DRECP assembly components. Refer to detailed maps and tables in the body of the document for more specific information.

Exhibit II.1-1 Components of the DRECP

In addition to alternative DFA and reserve design envelope configurations, each action alternative was designed to reflect a different balance of land use allocations for the full range of land uses on BLM lands. The BLM LUPA for each action alternative incorporates the alternative DFA configurations and is designed to accommodate the DRECP Plan-Wide Reserve Design Envelope and to achieve Step-Down Biological Objectives. However, the LUPA alternatives also reflect a range of potential modifications to existing land use plans and rules that reflect different approaches to balancing the management of all resources on BLM land, such as recreational, cultural, scenic, and mineral resources. In addition, the BLM LUPA for each action alternative takes into consideration the regional, statewide, and national importance of resource values on BLM lands (i.e., in addition to their *Plan-wide* importance), as well as the relatively recent analysis in the Solar Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (PEIS) of appropriate areas for solar development on BLM lands.

The BLM LUPA also evaluates a range of alternatives that consider the public land within the California Desert Conservation Area administered by the BLM for conservation purposes, and to consider designation of those lands as National Conservation Lands to be included in the National Landscape Conservation System, as directed under Public Law 111-11.

The DFA, reserve design envelope, and BLM LUPA were integrated to create the range of alternatives analyzed in detail in the DRECP. In general, the Preferred Alternative represents the alternative considered by the REAT to achieve the DRECP planning goals in the most balanced way.

Alternatives 1–4 are responsive to input received during scoping, Tribal–Federal Leadership Conferences, BLM–Tribal government-to-government dialogue, other public/stakeholder comments received during the planning process, input from local governments, and scientists and research. Alternative 1 emphasizes low biological resource conflict areas as requested by environmental non-governmental organizations and local communities. Alternative 2 emphasizes siting and design flexibility as requested by industry representatives. Alternatives 3 and 4 are variations on the themes of Alternatives 1 and 2 with additional consideration of ways to represent and consider BLM Variance Lands as identified in the BLM Solar PEIS. All of the action alternatives (the Preferred Alternative and Alternatives 1–4) were designed to avoid or substantially lessen one or more significant effects of the DRECP.

No Action Alternative

The No Action Alternative describes how state and federal renewable energy goals are currently being met and are projected to be met through 2040 in the absence of approval of the DRECP as a LUPA, NCCP, and GCP. Pursuant to CEQA and NEPA, the No Action Alternative is used to compare the relative impacts of not adopting and implementing the DRECP with those of the action alternatives. The No Action Alternative assumes that

renewable energy and transmission development and mitigation for such projects in the Plan Area would occur on a project-by-project basis in a pattern consistent with past and ongoing renewable energy and transmission projects on federal and non-federal lands within the Plan Area. The No Action Alternative would carry forward current planning documents, such as BLM land use plans (including existing amendments to those plans, such as the Solar PEIS). The No Action Alternative assumes a continuation of current management of projected renewable energy development, and it serves as a baseline for comparison of the action alternatives. The No Action Alternative includes conservation designations and protections found in each of the underlying land use plan/resource management plans. Under the No Action alternative, there would be no comprehensive LUPA, GCP, or NCCP for the California deserts.

II.1.2 Alternatives Not Carried Forward for Detailed Analysis

Eight alternatives considered during the EIR/EIS planning process have not been carried forward for detailed analysis in the Draft EIR/EIS. These include the following:

- Distributed Generation Alternative
- Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies (CEERT) and Large-Scale Solar Association (LSA) Proposed Solar Areas Alternative
- California Wind Energy Association (CalWEA) Proposed Wind Areas Alternative
- BLM-Only Lands Alternative
- Private Lands Alternative
- Dispersed Development Alternative
- Southeast Emphasis Alternative
- Avian Avoidance Alternative

These alternatives are described in Chapter II.8 of this volume along with the reasons why they were not carried forward for detailed analysis.

INTENTIONALLY LEFT BLANK