



DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan?

The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) is a landscape-scale, multi-agency, joint Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS) planning effort for 22.5 million acres in California's desert. Within the plan area, the DRECP will: 1) preserve, restore and enhance natural communities and ecosystems and conserve sensitive species; 2) protect and enhance other resources and values on U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM)-administered lands, including cultural resources, recreation opportunities, visual landscapes, etc.; 3) identify appropriate areas for the siting of utility-scale renewable energy projects; and 4) provide efficient and predictable environmental review and permitting for projects sited in these areas.

The plan consists of three components that will each support the DRECP's overall goals of efficient and predictable renewable energy development and associated transmission while providing for conservation of critical desert ecosystems:

- A Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) under the California NCCP Act and the California Endangered Species Act;
- A General Conservation Plan (GCP) under the Federal Endangered Species Act; and
- BLM Land Use Plan Amendments (LUPA) under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act.

You can learn more about the DRECP and download the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

Why do we need the DRECP?

Renewable energy is a top priority for the U.S. Department of the Interior and the State of California. Because of these common goals, state and federal agencies involved in the renewable energy permitting process recognized the need for a comprehensive plan to steer renewable energy development to the most appropriate locations in the desert while protecting the most sensitive areas. The agencies agreed in 2008 to prepare a landscape-level plan, the DRECP, for efficient and predictable renewable energy and transmission permitting while conserving biological and natural resources, recreation, cultural areas and other values in the southern California desert. The DRECP will advance state and federal conservation goals in the desert regions of California while also facilitating the timely permitting of renewable energy projects in appropriate areas. The DRECP will allow agencies and the public to work together at a landscape level to decide where it is appropriate to site future renewable energy projects and where it is not. The DRECP provides an opportunity for local, state and federal agencies to consider renewable energy, wildlife, recreation and many other values of the desert together in one planning process.

To learn more about the Purpose and Need for the DRECP, please see Volume I, Section I.1 of the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

Who is preparing the DRECP?

The U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Energy Commission (CEC), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) are working in cooperation with several other state and federal agencies that manage lands or programs in the desert or that manage or regulate renewable energy development and transmission. Local governments, environmental organizations, renewable energy developers, utilities and other interested parties are also actively participating in the DRECP's development and providing valuable input.

What alternatives are in the draft DRECP EIR/EIS?

The draft DRECP includes five alternatives, or proposed approaches, for achieving the plan's goals. The preferred alternative is the option that the agencies have initially concluded is the best approach to meeting the DRECP's goals, referred to as the Purpose and Need. The draft DRECP also includes four other action alternatives and a no action alternative. Each alternative was developed in response to public input received during the planning process.

The alternatives present different ways to achieve the renewable energy, conservation and other resource goals of the plan. With these different approaches come trade-offs. An alternative that emphasizes the siting of renewable energy projects on already disturbed lands might have greater potential impacts to farmland and limit renewable energy siting flexibility. An alternative that provides broader areas for siting renewable energy projects might require more transmission infrastructure and have greater impacts to certain habitats or other resources. After taking public comments into consideration, the state and federal agencies will decide whether the preferred alternative, one of the other alternatives, or some combination of the alternatives best achieves the goals of the DRECP.

To learn more about the alternatives in the draft DRECP EIR/EIS, please see Volume II of the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

Why are the agencies planning for 20,000 megawatts of renewable energy in the desert?

Renewable energy is a top priority for the Department of the Interior and the State of California. Recognizing these common priorities, the draft DRECP assumes that up to 20,000 megawatts of renewable energy could be generated in the California desert to reach state and federal long-term renewable energy and climate goals for 2020 and beyond. This assumption is based on an analysis included in the draft DRECP that estimates the amount of new renewable energy generation that may be needed based on future demand. This planning assumption is used to estimate the maximum amount of land that could be impacted by renewable energy development and to quantify potential impacts. The figure does not represent a target or goal that will drive future development. The actual demand for renewable energy generation in the desert will depend on market factors and state and federal policies, as well as other influences. The DRECP can achieve its goals and provide benefits even if the actual amount of renewable energy development in the desert does not conform to the DRECP's planning assumption.

To learn more about the renewable energy acreage calculator used to inform renewable energy planning assumptions in the draft DRECP EIR/EIS, please review Volume I, Section 1.3.5. and Appendix F3 of the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

Will the DRECP favor large-scale renewable energy development over small-scale distributed generation?

The DRECP is one part of California's comprehensive strategy for addressing climate change and meeting the energy needs of residents and business. This strategy includes utility-scale renewable energy development, distributed generation, energy conservation, demand response, strong energy efficiency standards and investment in research and development. Utility-scale renewable energy plays an important and complementary role in this overall strategy, allowing for immediate and sizeable deployment of renewable energy generation, grid stability and optimal use of the state's best renewable energy resources, and allowing for technologies with unique benefits such as energy storage. While the DRECP will provide efficient and predictable large-scale renewable energy development in appropriate places in the desert, every element of California's overall strategy will be needed to meet long-term climate goals. The DRECP will not limit or supplant gains in energy efficiency or deployment of small-scale renewable energy.

To learn more about alternatives considered but not carried forward for analysis in the draft DRECP EIR/EIS, including a distributed generation alternative, please see Volume II, Section II.1.2 of the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

What is a BLM Land Use Plan Amendment?

The BLM is proposing to amend three land use plans that cover the 10 million acres of BLM-managed lands within the plan area. Decisions made through the DRECP planning process will establish management direction for lands that can be made available for renewable energy generation, as well as required conservation and management actions. Substantial changes proposed in the Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) include new or revised land designations for National Conservation Lands, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wildlife Allocations and Special Recreation Management Areas.

To learn more about the LUPA proposed in the draft DRECP EIR/EIS, please see the alternatives in Volume II of the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

What is a General Conservation Plan?

The General Conservation Plan (GCP) policy was developed by the USFWS to streamline processes associated with developing Habitat Conservation Plans under section 10(a)(1)(B) of the federal Endangered Species Act. A GCP allows the USFWS to develop a conservation plan suitable for the needs of a local area, complete all environmental review requirements for incidental take permit (ITP) issuance, and then issue individual permits to landowners or entities wishing to apply for an ITP who demonstrate compliance with the terms and conditions of the GCP.

The USFWS is proposing an innovative approach to streamlining the permitting process for renewable energy and transmission projects within the plan area. The DRECP GCP efficient and predictable permitting process would be open to any non-Federal renewable energy applicant, including state agencies, cities, counties, and individual developers. If a local government signed onto the DRECP and was issued a permit under the GCP, the county or city would be able to extend their incidental take authorization to qualified renewable energy developers over which they have jurisdiction, thus providing the local government more control over renewable energy development within its jurisdiction.

To learn more about the GCP process in the draft DRECP EIR/EIS, please review Volume I, Section I.3.3 of the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

What is a Natural Community Conservation Plan?

The Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) program of CDFW takes a broad-based ecosystem approach to planning for the protection and perpetuation of biological diversity. A NCCP identifies and provides for the regional or area-wide protection of plants, animals, and their habitats, while allowing compatible and appropriate economic activity – in this case, renewable energy and transmission development.

California Fish and Game Code Section 2835 authorizes CDFW to permit the take of any covered species whose conservation and management are provided for in an approved NCCP. The NCCP presented in the draft DRECP encompasses the entire plan area. The NCCP would allow CDFW to authorize renewable energy project proponents to take covered species, including fully-protected species and species listed as endangered or threatened under the California Endangered Species Act, if the project proponents comply with the conservation provisions outlined in the NCCP. The NCCP includes BLM-managed lands within the plan area for purposes of state permitting of renewable energy and transmission projects and because the conservation value of BLM-managed lands for covered species and natural communities is a key part of the NCCP.

To learn more about the NCCP proposed in the draft DRECP EIR/EIS, please see Volume I, Section I.3.2 of the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

How can I participate in the DRECP planning process?

The draft DRECP was published in the *Federal Register* and State Clearinghouse on September 26, 2014, initiating a 90-day comment period. In order to accommodate the holiday season, the comment period will officially close on January 9, 2015, 106 days from the date of publication. The agencies will host a variety of informational and formal public

meetings in and around the plan area as well as in Sacramento. An informational webinar providing tips and information on how to navigate the document will be presented online as well as viewable in several plan area locations on October 9, 2014, and will be available on the DRECP website for future reference. There will be a series of formal public meetings during the comment period to present the plan, answer questions, and receive oral and written comments during the last two weeks in October 2014 and first week of November 2014. Information about the informational webinar and public meeting schedule is available at www.drecp.org.

The agencies are also making available the DRECP Gateway, an innovative online mapping tool, to foster a geographic-based understanding of the plan. The DRECP Gateway is available at drecp.databasin.org.