



Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan Frequently Asked Questions Updated June 2015

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 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) streamline environmental review and permitting for projects sited in these areas.

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 Department of the Interior and the State of California. California has a 33 percent Renewable Portfolio Standard, the highest in the nation. 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 Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP), to streamline 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?



A partnership of state and federal agencies is preparing the DRECP including 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). These agencies 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, 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 purpose of the DRECP is to plan for renewable energy development in the California desert region that helps the state meet long-term greenhouse gas reduction goals (80 percent below 1990 by 2050) while conserving and managing desert plant and wildlife communities.

The DRECP is one part of California's comprehensive strategy for addressing climate change and meeting the state's energy needs. This strategy includes utility-scale renewable energy development, distributed generation, energy conservation, demand response, strong energy efficiency standards and investments in research and development. (For additional information on California's Renewable Action Plan, visit [the 2012 Integrated Energy Policy Report \(IEPR\) Update](#), which has an entire chapter dedicated to it.)

Utility-scale renewable energy plays an important and complementary role in the 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. It also allows for needed technologies such as energy storage.

Large renewable energy projects also have the most immediate and significant impact on fighting climate change. In order to meet our long-term climate goals on time, at a reasonable cost, and while providing reliable electricity to power the seventh largest economy in the world, California will need to take advantage of the regional and technological diversity in renewable energy resources statewide and across the western region.

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 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 Land Use Plan Amendments proposed in the Draft DRECP EIR/EIS, please see the alternatives in Volume II of the draft at www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

HOW DOES THE DRAFT DRECP IDENTIFY AREAS MOST APPROPRIATE FOR RENEWABLE ENERGY DEVELOPMENT?

The DRECP is proposing Development Focus Areas (DFAs) where renewable energy projects could benefit from a more efficient and predictable environmental review under the DRECP. The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS presents a Preferred Alternative, four action alternatives, and a no action alternative, each with different arrangements and sizes of DFAs. The amount of land proposed in the DFAs across the action alternatives ranges between 1.1 and 2.4 million acres. The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS also includes Study Area Lands, which are areas outside of DFAs that could be available for renewable energy development in the future based on future assessment and/or special analysis.

To learn more about Development Focus Areas, please see Volume I, Section 3 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS available at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

WHAT ENERGY PROJECTS ARE COVERED BY THE DRECP?

Projects that could benefit from a more efficient and predictable environmental review and permitting process are considered "Covered Activities." Covered Activities include:

- Geothermal power plants within DFAs
- Solar power plants (photovoltaic and solar thermal) within DFAs,
- Wind power plants within DFAs, and
- Transmission facilities and lines inside and outside DFAs but within the Plan Area.

To learn more about renewable energy covered activities in the DRECP, please see Volume I Section 3 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS available at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

HOW WILL PERMITS FOR A RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECT BE PROCESSED? WILL ENVIRONMENTAL REVIEW BE LESS RIGOROUS?

Renewable energy projects proposed in Development Focus Areas must still undergo environmental review in compliance with State and Federal laws. However, these projects would benefit from the



DRECP's programmatic environmental review and would have more predictable State and Federal permitting requirements. Renewable energy projects proposed on BLM lands which are consistent with the DRECP would also be given other incentives in BLM's right-of-way process.

To learn more about the implementation process envisioned for the DRECP, please see Volume II, Section 3 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS available at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

WILL THE DRECP APPROVE NEW DEVELOPMENT?

The DRECP itself would not approve any renewable energy development projects. Individual renewable energy projects would continue to follow existing laws and regulations, and would continue to seek necessary project-specific approvals from applicable local, State or Federal agencies, such as county governments, the California Energy Commission, and the BLM. The DRECP would establish avoidance, minimization, and compensation measures and other environmental requirements for renewable energy projects to protect Covered Species, ecosystem function, cultural resources, recreation, and other values.

To learn more the permitting process envisioned for the DRECP, please see Volume II, Section 3 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS available at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

WILL THE DRECP BRING MORE DEVELOPMENT TO THE DESERT?

The DRECP does not require or increase demand for renewable energy development in the desert. The DRECP identifies areas in the plan area suitable for development of utility-scale wind, solar and geothermal energy projects. Renewable energy projects have already been developed in the region and it is likely more will be built with or without the DRECP. The DRECP takes a landscape-scale approach to determine where renewable energy development should and should not be located in the future.

To learn more the purpose and need for the DRECP, please review Volume I, Section 1 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS available at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

WHY DOES CALIFORNIA NEED MORE LARGE-SCALE RENEWABLE ENERGY PROJECTS?

It is important to view the DRECP in the context of California's comprehensive strategy for addressing climate change while still meeting the energy needs of residents and businesses. Distributed generation, energy conservation, demand response, energy efficiency standards, research and development, and utility-scale renewable energy projects all play important and complementary roles in this strategy. Utility-scale renewable projects are an important part of this portfolio because of the unique benefits they provide to the state. Utility-scale renewable projects also allow for optimal use of some of the



state's best renewable energy resources, can be quickly deployed at a large scale, and enable more cost effective energy storage.

It is possible that not all of the 20,000 megawatts that the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS can accommodate will actually be developed or needed. Actual demand for renewable energy generation in the desert will depend on market factors, state and federal policies, and other influences. Even if actual renewable energy development in the desert is less than this planning assumption, the DRECP will still provide significant benefits to the state and achieve the plan goals.

For details about alternatives considered but not carried forward, including distributed generation, please see Volume II, Section 4 in the Draft DRECP at: [/draftdrecp](#).

To learn more about these models and the Renewable Energy Acreage Calculator, please review Volume I, Section 3 and Appendix F3 in the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

WHY IS A CONSERVATION PLAN NEEDED?

The deserts of California support many rare, threatened, and endangered plant and wildlife species and natural communities. These deserts also provide some of the best opportunities in the world for renewable energy development. The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS is designed to support both the conservation of species and natural communities and the development of compatible renewable energy projects, and to minimize conflicts between them.

The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS is a landscape-scale plan that uses science as a basis for a conservation strategy for species that would provide systematic habitat protection and connectivity improvements across the Mojave and Colorado/Sonoran desert regions. This comprehensive strategy reflects an improvement from the project-by-project approach currently used to permit renewable energy projects and protect species. The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS considers the potential impacts from renewable energy facility development in the desert over the next 25 years and, through strategic habitat conservation, provides an ecosystem approach to compensating for impacts and conserving natural resources at a landscape level.

To learn more about the conservation strategy, please see Volume I, Section 3 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

WHAT ARE THE BENEFITS OF REGIONAL CONSERVATION PLANNING AT A LANDSCAPE-SCALE?

The benefits of conservation planning on a regional scale include:

- A broad range of interested parties can work collaboratively in an open, public process to develop a regional conservation plan



- Covered renewable energy projects proceed in a manner that is compatible with the conservation of affected species and habitats
- Through strategic habitat conservation, regional conservation plans achieve better results than piecemeal project-by-project, species-by-species permitting
- Regional conservation plans streamline, standardize, and create predictable processes for endangered species permits, creating greater regulatory and economic certainty.

To learn more about the benefits of the biological conservation planning process in the DRECP, please see Volume I, Section 3 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

WHAT SPECIES AND NATURAL COMMUNITIES ARE INCLUDED IN THE DRAFT DRECP?

The DRECP "Covered Species" are the plants and animals for which the DRECP would provide conservation and management and for which "incidental take" resulting from covered renewable energy and transmission projects would be authorized over the term of the DRECP. The Covered Species list was developed with input from the public, stakeholders, and Independent Science Advisors and includes 27 animal and 10 plant species.

The DRECP conservation strategy also addresses 31 natural communities. Natural communities are assemblages of vegetation types and the plant and animal species that use those vegetation types as habitat.

To learn more about the species and natural communities in the DRECP, please see Appendix B of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

HOW IS PERMITTING OF GOLDEN EAGLES HANDLED IN THE DRECP SINCE THE EAGLE IS PROTECTED BY THE FEDERAL BALD AND GOLDEN EAGLE PROTECTION ACT (EAGLE ACT) AND IS A FULLY PROTECTED SPECIES UNDER CALIFORNIA LAW?

The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS proposes a framework for permitting the take of golden eagle under the Eagle Act and California's Fully Protected species statutes on both federal and non-federal land. For non-federal land, the incidental take of golden eagles would be permitted through the General Conservation Plan and Natural Communities Conservation Plan. On federal land, incidental take would be permitted through the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act and the Natural Communities Conservation Planning Act.

WHAT LANDS ARE INCLUDED IN THE DRECP PLAN AREA?

The DRECP plan area covers 22.5 million acres in California's desert region, including lands within Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego counties. The plan area



includes public lands (federal and state owned and managed) and private lands. Lands that are legislatively and legally protected, such as Wilderness Areas and National Parks, and military lands, are included in the DRECP plan boundary, however the DRECP does not affect the existing management of such lands.

County Name	Non-Federal Acres	Federal Acres	Total Acres
Imperial County	1,071,000	1,704,000	2,775,000
Inyo County	320,000	2,668,000	2,987,000
Kern County	925,000	821,000	1,746,000
Los Angeles County	625,000	55,000	680,000
Riverside County	301,000	1,846,000	2,147,000
San Bernardino County	2,075,000	9,907,000	11,982,000
San Diego County	267,000	200	26,782,000
Grand Total	5,584,000	17,001,200	22,585,000

Note: The following general rounding rules were applied to calculated values: 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, and therefore totals may not sum due to rounding. In cases where subtotals are provided, the subtotals and the totals are individually rounded. The totals are not a sum of the rounded subtotals; therefore the subtotals may not sum to the total within the table.

To learn more about the land use types in the DRECP, please see Volume I, Section 3 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

HOW ARE THE ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACTS OF THE PLAN ANALYZED?

The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS includes a draft environmental analysis in accordance with the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). CEQA and NEPA require an evaluation of the DRECP's impacts on the environment. The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS includes five alternatives, or proposed approaches, for achieving the Plan's goals. The REAT agencies have initially concluded that the Preferred Alternative is the best approach to meeting the DRECP's goals. The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS 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 and analyzed



at a programmatic level. The Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS also analyzes the "no action" alternative, the alternative in which agencies maintain current policies and management and do not approve a new NCCP, GCP, or LUPA.

Under CEQA, the purpose of a Programmatic Environmental Impact Report is to allow a lead agency to "consider broad policy alternatives and program wide mitigation measures at an early time when the agency has greater flexibility to deal with basic problems or cumulative impacts" (14 CCR 15168[b][4]). Similarly, under NEPA, a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement is prepared to consider "broad federal actions such as the adoption of new agency programs or regulations...timed to coincide with meaningful points in agency planning and decision making" (40 CFR 1502.4[b]). The DRECP's programmatic EIS and EIR discusses at a broad level the general environmental consequences of this complex, long-term integrated plan and describes regional impacts within the Plan Area.

The precise impacts of individual renewable energy projects cannot readily be identified at this early planning stage; additional environmental analysis under CEQA and NEPA will be prepared to address project-specific impacts at the time when individual renewable energy projects are proposed.

To learn more about the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS, please see Volume II and Volume III of the Draft DRECP EIR/EIS at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

HOW IS SCIENCE BEING INCORPORATED INTO THE DRECP?

The Draft DRECP is based on the best available scientific information about desert habitats and the plants and wildlife they support. In October 2010, an Independent Science Advisory (ISA) panel issued recommendations to the agencies. A second Independent Science Advisory Panel was convened in June 2012. The purpose of the second ISA panel was to provide further scientific review of DRECP documents and to make recommendations on certain critical issues, such as climate change.

To learn more about how the DRECP incorporates science and how the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS responds to the recommendations from the 2010 and 2012 Independent Science Panel, please see Appendix E at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

WHAT IS CALIFORNIA EXECUTIVE ORDER S-14-08?

California Executive Order S-14-08 established a State policy goal of producing 33 percent of California's electrical needs with renewable energy sources by 2020. Senate Bill 2-X1 (Simitian, 2011) codifies the 33 percent goal and requires the State to meet this renewable energy mandate. California Executive Order S-14-08 also specifies the development of the DRECP in the Colorado and Mojave desert regions.

California Executive Order S-14-08 is available at: <http://gov.ca.gov/news.php?id=11072>



WHAT IS SECRETARIAL ORDER 3285?

The Secretary of the Interior's Secretarial Order 3285 established a national policy encouraging the production, development, and delivery of renewable energy as one of the Department of the Interior's highest priorities. From this policy, agencies and bureaus within the Department work collaboratively with each other and with other Federal agencies, departments, states, local communities and private landowners to encourage the timely and responsible development of renewable energy and associated transmission while protecting and enhancing the nation's water, wildlife, cultural, and other natural resources.

Secretarial Order 3285 is available

at: www.doi.gov/whatwedo/climate/cop15/upload/SecOrder3289.pdf

WHAT IS SECRETARIAL ORDER 3330?

The purpose of the Secretary of the Interior's Secretarial Order 3330 is to establish a Department wide mitigation strategy for the Department that will ensure consistency and efficiency in the review and permitting of infrastructure development projects and in conserving our valuable natural and cultural resources.

Central to the Department's strategy is (1) the use of a landscape-scale approach to identify and facilitate investment in key conservation priorities in a region; (2) early integration of mitigation considerations in project planning and design; (3) ensuring the durability of mitigation measures over time; (4) ensuring transparency and consistency in mitigation decisions; and (5) a focus on mitigation efforts that improve the resilience of our Nation's resources in the face of climate change.

Secretarial Order 3330 is available at: www.doi.gov/news/upload/secretarial-order-mitigation.pdf

HOW WILL THE DRECP AFFECT THE PUBLIC'S ABILITY TO ACCESS AND RECREATE ON BLM LAND IN THE DESERT?

The BLM is proposing several land use designations on public lands through the DRECP, including Development Focus Areas which would be available for utility scale renewable energy, conservation designations (e.g. National Conservation Lands and Areas of Critical Environmental Concern) where renewable energy would not be permitted, and Special Recreation Management Areas that would be managed as high priority recreation areas where renewable energy would not be permitted. The BLM is



proposing a range of alternative management approaches that would ensure that appropriate access, recreation, and other activities on these undeveloped public lands would not be impeded by renewable energy development.

To learn more about how BLM lands would be managed under the preferred Land Use Plan Amendment, please see Volume II, Section 3 of the Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS at: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp.

HOW WILL THE DRECP AFFECT PRIVATE LANDS AND LOCAL LAND USE PLANNING?

The DRECP will not affect local government land use authority over the review and permitting of renewable energy projects on private land. Local governments will continue to be the lead CEQA agencies for most renewable energy projects. Thermal projects 50 megawatts and over will continue to be under the Energy Commission's jurisdiction.

The REAT agencies adjusted the plan's path forward based on public comments, which included the counties need to complete local planning activities regarding renewable energy and conservation on private land.

WHAT ROLE DID LOCAL GOVERNMENTS PLAY IN THE DRECP PROCESS?

The seven counties in the DRECP area—Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego—were all actively engaged with plan's development and submitted detailed comments on the draft.

All but San Diego County were also part of the Stakeholder Committee that informed the plan's development and provided a forum for public participation and input.

Five of the counties—Imperial, Inyo, Los Angeles, Riverside, and San Bernardino—applied for and received Renewable Energy Conservation Planning Grants from the Energy Commission. Under MOUs signed with the state and in a manner consistent with goals set forth in a planning agreement, these counties formed cooperative relationships to effectively plan for and promote renewable energy development in a way that advances the counties' and state's renewable energy policies and initiatives.

The overall goal of this work is to implement the DRECP in a manner consistent with the applicable policies of counties that are finalizing land use planning processes that include, or are focused on, renewable energy development.

HOW WILL BLM ENSURE CONSERVATION MEASURES AND LAND-BASED CONSERVATION DELIVERED THROUGH THE DRECP SATISFY CERTAIN REQUIREMENTS OF THE NCCP AND ARE DURABLE IN THE LONG TERM?



In November 2012, the BLM and CDFW signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) outlining their intent to cooperate and coordinate to enhance conservation on public lands through the use of a series of site- and circumstance-specific tools. More recently, the BLM and CDFW developed an agreement more specific to the DRECP that describes how and where the tools agreed upon in November 2012 would be applied. The agreement is still in draft form and may change in order to accommodate input received during the public review of the Draft DRECP. The draft agreement has been formulated to support implementation of the plan decisions under any of the action alternatives in the Draft DRECP, although adoption of some alternatives may require adjustments to the draft agreement. Once executed, the agreement will provide a framework through which the two agencies will have memorialized and made specific their cooperation and coordination to protect and conserve fish, wildlife, plants and their habitat within the DRECP Area. It is the intention of BLM and CDFW to execute the agreement adjusted pursuant to public review at the same time as, or closely subsequent to, the DRECP Record of Decision.

To review the November 2012 MOU and the September 2014 draft durability agreement, please see: www.drecp.org/whatisdrepc/mou.html