

Energy - Docket Optical System

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To: Energy - Docket Optical System
Subject: DRECP Alternative Scenarios of July 25, 2012

Categories: Ready to Docket

California Energy Commission

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the July 25, 2012, renewable energy development alternatives of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP).

I am writing regarding the Morongo Basin and its surrounding communities, where there is a long heritage of commitment and action to protect desert lands. This area is a unique collection of high-desert small towns and communities nestled amongst conserved lands: Joshua Tree National Park, Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, Pioneertown Mountains Preserve, and Bighorn Mountain Wilderness. In addition, these communities have pitched in their own money to acquire lands identified for protection, purchasing private lands and gifting them to Joshua Tree National Park.

Threats to undo this conservation are a serious concern for me, because this geography is a foundational element of the area's quality of life and economic base. The area's economy is significantly based on tourists who come to see the desert AS IT IS NOW. In recent years, the spotlight has been shone on the high desert as a place for development of renewable energy projects. While I support that effort in general, I believe that the siting of such development in locations like the Morongo Basin and its surrounding area would be disastrous to the local lifestyle and to the tourism-based economy.

Concerned citizens successfully opposed the ill-sited Green Path North transmission line proposed by LADWP to be built in undeveloped backcountry and along the viewshed of these high-desert communities. That inappropriate project could have been the door that opened the floodgates to more inappropriate energy development and transmission. That citizen effort led me to become a proactive participant in renewable energy siting decisions, first with the RETI process, then the Solar PEIS and now the DRECP.

The July 25 published scenarios of the DRECP were surprising. I am very disturbed and oppose the scenarios siting solar and wind development in the Morongo Basin on BLM lands next to Joshua Tree National Park and in undeveloped backcountry surrounding Big Morongo Canyon Preserve, Pioneertown Mountains Preserve, and Bighorn Mountain Wilderness. This siting and the addition of variance lands for more development is just inappropriate and inconsistent with the area's quality of life, its citizens' values, the tourism-based economy, and the San Bernardino County Master Plan.

The DRECP process should involve some outreach to affected communities. There were no workshops or meetings held in the Morongo Basin area, and its citizens received no correspondence or communication of any kind. The alternative maps have changed with little or no explanation, and the iterations of these alternatives have not allowed ample time for thoughtful comment. Considering the long-term effect of the plan, the comment period should be extended beyond the August 8 deadline.

I urge you to consider a scenario that does not develop renewable energy in the high-desert, tourism-based communities. I encourage adoption of Alternative 1 after first deleting the variance lands or adoption of Alternative 2.

SIGNATURE: __Phyllis Schwartz_____

