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

Re: 09-Renew EO-01

To the Renewable Energy Action Team:

On behalf of the California Native Plant Society, I am submitting comments to the Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT) for consideration in developing the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) as required by Renewable Energy Executive Order S-14-08.

The California Native Plant Society (CNPS) works to protect California's native plant heritage and preserve it for future generations. We are a non-profit organization whose nearly 10,000 members work to promote native plant conservation through 33 chapters located statewide.

CNPS acknowledges the urgency to develop energy projects to meet the Renewable Portfolio Standard of 33% by 2020, and strongly endorses the development of the DRECP as a landscape level analysis for the siting of all types of renewable energy development in California's desert region.

Comprehensive planning across the entire California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) is needed to address management actions that will ensure the long term conservation of ecosystems by protecting critical habitat areas and preserving landscape-scale habitat connectivity. Desert plant communities in pristine areas within the CDCA are poised for tremendous losses in the face of pending renewable energy applications. We offer the following recommendations to help guide the development of the DRECP process in an effort to advance protection for natural resources while enabling development of these areas for non-carbon based energy to proceed:

The DRECP must be developed and approved as a Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP)

Executive Order S-14-08 directs the REAT lead agencies to develop the DRECP as per the NCCP process. CNPS will be vigilant to ensure that the DRECP conforms to the NCCP process, especially regarding the requirements and permit conditions associated with receiving take authorization under the NCCP process.

Direct projects to degraded or disturbed areas on public or private lands

The use of degraded lands limits the impact to natural resources. The use of degraded lands also requires a less intensive environmental review and is likely to reduce the time it takes to achieve project approval.

Increase the number of projects directed to private lands

Develop incentives for private land development of renewable energy projects. This would alleviate some of the demand on public lands while contributing directly to the local county's tax base.

Maintain environmental review on public lands

Environmental review is necessary to identify and protect public trust values. Completion of such reviews is critical to fulfilling the promise of "green" and renewable energy and should not be eliminated or truncated on public lands.

Locate projects near existing transmission lines

Maintaining a small footprint to support energy development will lessen the impacts on the environment and reduce infrastructure costs.

Include contributions of energy conservation and distributed renewable energy when calculating the amount of utility-scale renewable projects needed within the CDCA

The quantity of energy generated within the CDCA must be calculated with energy conservation and "rooftop" solar generation as part of the equation. This approach focuses on reducing the total amount of energy used, develops the energy closer to the demand, and protects natural resources.

Minimize groundwater use associated with renewable energy generation in the desert

Use of groundwater resources for renewable energy generation in desert habitats should be avoided.

Develop criteria for areas to avoid in siting renewable energy projects

CNPS believes the following criteria need to be used by the REAT to identify areas to be avoided when siting renewable energy projects:

- Locations that support sensitive biological resources, including: federally designated and proposed critical habitat; significant populations of federal or state threatened and endangered species, significant populations of sensitive, rare and special status

species, including CNPS List 1B, 2 and 4 species, and rare or unique plant communities.

- Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Wildlife Habitat Management Areas, proposed HCP and NCCP Conservation Reserves.

- Lands purchased for conservation including those conveyed to the BLM. Landscape-level biological linkage areas required for the continued functioning of biological and ecological processes.

- Proposed Wilderness Areas, proposed National Monuments, and Citizens' Wilderness Inventory Areas.

- Wetlands and riparian areas, including the upland habitat and groundwater resources required to protect the integrity of seeps, springs, streams or wetlands.

- National Historic Register eligible sites and other known cultural resources.

- Locations directly adjacent to National or State Park units.

We recognize the increasing challenge to meet the needs of people while protecting and sustaining the natural environment around us. We are committed to working with the REAT and others to achieve the right balance in California's deserts through the DRECP process.

Sincerely,

Greg Suba

Greg Suba
Conservation Program Director
California Native Plant Society