



BAKER COMMUNITY SERVICES DISTRICT

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May 20, 2013

U.S. Congressman Paul Cook
1222 Longworth House Office Bldg.
Washington, DC 20515

Re: Baker, CA announces formal opposition to Silurian Wind and Solar Hybrid Project and requests congressional support with this federal issue.

Greetings Sir:

My name is Le Hayes. I am the General Manager for the desert town of Baker, California and have been so for nearly 23 years. Baker C.S.D provides governmental services, such as Water, Wastewater, Solid Waste, Fire Protection, Park and Recreation, including a public park, a 90,000 gallon swimming pool, a Senior Center, a Community Center, Road Maintenance, and Street Lighting, for the unincorporated town of Baker. We are an independent special district formed under California Government Code 61000. We have a Board of Directors, elected at large from within the district, which performs the same function as a City Council in an incorporated city. I am proud to say that, as opposed to some other jurisdictions in California, we are financially stable. We operate the District as a business, not as a government.

During the regular meeting of our Board of Directors on May 16th, the subject of the Silurian Valley Wind/Solar project(s) proposed by Iberdrola on Highway 127 (Death Valley Road), just north of Baker came up for discussion. Our board expressed unanimous and **strong opposition** to that development, while expressing unanimous and **strong support** for a scenic highway connecting Joshua Tree N.P., Mojave Preserve and Death Valley N.P. They asked that I contact our elected representatives and express their concerns.

A bit of background: The project area is on the boundary of both the Hollow Hills and Kingston Range Wilderness areas and the Salt Creek Hills area of critical environmental concern is just to the north. There is more than one version of their proposal(s). According to BLM, Iberdrola originally proposed a ROW of 29,000 acres for a combination wind and solar array, using about 10,000 acres for Solar and the balance for wind turbines, but later decided to apply for an additional 7,000 acres south of the wind project for Solar.

I am a Historian and in 2005 I published a history book titled "Pilgrims in the Desert, The Early History of the East Mojave Desert and the Baker, California Area." I have spent a lot of time out in that area and there is a huge amount of history there, including the Old Spanish Trail, a trade route connecting Santa Fe, New Mexico with the Los Angeles area which was being settled at the time. Beginning in about 1830 that route was used extensively by pack trains. A branch of the trail known as the "Kingston Cutoff" leaves the route at Silurian Lake. In time the western portion of the O.S.T became known as the "Mormon Road", a wagon road connecting Salt Lake City with the newly settled Los Angeles area. In 1852 Brigham Young sent 300 settlers along the route to establish a city named San Bernardino. The first Gold in Southern California was discovered at Salt Spring by Mormon travelers. There are many historic remains there including the Amargosa House, reported to be the oldest existing structure in the Mojave Desert. Salt Spring is just north of the area Iberdrola wants to industrialize. The project footprint would be built on top of the Old Spanish Trail.

Several years ago I went with a group from the Mojave River Valley Museum to view "Rock Rings" and other remains of ancient Indian sites in an area just across the highway from this proposed area. The Tonopah and Tidewater Railroad was constructed in 1906-07 through the current project footprint. There are many more historical areas out there that need to be protected.

When I look at this project and others I see the Mulholland/Owens River debacle repeated. As you know Mulholland, acting in collusion with the Forest Service, created an aqueduct which diverted the Owens River to feed water to Los Angeles, leaving Owens Lake dry and creating one of the biggest environmental disasters in the nation. As we speak today the City of Los Angeles is in court denying any further responsibility for the largest single source of dust pollution in the nation (Owens Lake). When one looks at the remains of Owens Lake today it is hard to imagine a stern wheeled steam ship named the Bessie Brady hauling charcoal and wood across the lake to the Cerro Gordo mines and on the return trip carrying silver-Lead ingots to the west shore of the lake.

It is easy to draw many parallels between Owens Lake and the proposed solar/wind developments in the Mojave Desert. Clearly, we still have those who, rather than provide for themselves, wish to pillage the surrounding areas. The Santa Margarita Water District wishing to deplete the Cadiz aquifer in the desert is an example of an ongoing effort to pillage remote areas so they can keep their lawns and golf courses green. The Iberdrola project is an example of the ongoing pillage of the desert, scraping off thousands of acres, to generate electricity so the metropolitan areas can light their streets, big box parking lots, etc.

Iberdrola plans to construct 80 to 133 giant wind turbines nearly 500 feet tall! Why so tall? *Possibly due to the marginal, seasonal wind resources present there.* I have no idea what amount of money and conventional energy is consumed to create such a tall structure, with a giant electrical generator on top, transport it to a site which has been scraped off and erect it on enormous foundations, but the initial cost has to be in the millions. They estimate they will need about 18,000,000 gallons of water to make cement for the foundations during

construction and they speculate the water may come from on site. I don't know about the aquifer under that site, but I can tell you the water in the same valley a short distance away in Baker is known as "ancient water." It is highly mineralized, salty, and with current technology is pretty much unusable for anything. The TDS (total dissolved solids) of that ancient water is about 5,000 mg/L. The **maximum** level permitted in drinking water in California is 1,000 mg/L. The potable water solution for Baker was to go up the alluvial to the east and drill there for better quality water.

Wind Energy: Wind power is unreliable and unpredictable, no wind, no power, too much wind, no power, because the turbines are shut down to prevent damage. The U.S. Energy Administration, information statistics says "To achieve 20% of electricity supplies from renewables by 2020 would roughly double the retail cost of electricity in the USA."

Most of the developed nations of the world have already discarded wind energy as a viable method of producing electricity. For instance:

Denmark - sometimes known as the "wind farm country" has the most expensive electricity in Europe and the government has placed a moratorium on further wind developments.

Norway, has discarded wind production because of its "serious environmental effects, insufficient production and high production costs."

Germany - has concluded "The negative effect of wind energy is as much underestimated as its contribution to the statistics is overestimated."

France - has concluded that "To use wind turbines along with other conventional energy producing systems to cover for the lack of wind periods is a particularly wasteful way of trying to reduce gas emissions."

The U.K. - says "The environmental impacts of wind power projects have become increasingly apparent during the 1990's. It can only provide a very small fraction of the output required to meet total energy needs."

Additionally, The California Energy Commission says: "The wind turbines in Altamont Pass in California have on average killed 2-300 Red-tailed Hawks and 40-60 Golden Eagles each year."

The proposed Iberdrola wind/solar development will require the construction of a new powerline about 10 miles from the site to the electrical substation in Baker, two blocks away from our K thru 12 School. There are a number of problems with that powerline. First it doesn't appear that Iberdrola has any agreement allowing them to connect to the powerlines running through Baker. Secondly, whether those lines have the capacity of carrying any additional electricity which might be generated is also unclear. A third problem with that connection is that they don't seem to have any purchase agreement with anyone for the power they might produce.

The answer to the power loss and expense of long transmission lines is local infrastructure to produce energy for local use where it is consumed. That also permits any excess power which is produced to flow back into the local grid.

“Thin Film” photovoltaic solar design usually requires the removal of all vegetation and 100 percent grading of the site. I find nothing in the Iberdrola proposal which talks about dust control. Their solar arrays will be coated with dust and even a thin film of dust substantially degrades the performance of a solar panel. When dust gets on the panels they will have to be washed. So what happens? Do they drive a dust producing vehicle down the long rows of solar panels on barren desert ground to wash them? Where does the water come from? Most likely they cannot use onsite water for that because of the high mineral/salt content of that water. Soon their panels would be covered with a white film.

Perhaps the other thing they don’t realize is that desert thunderstorms can create a huge amount of rain in a short period of time which creates runoff. Plants, rocks and other natural features of the desert sometimes protect it from damage, but there are large gullies all over that area. Water creates those gullies. A huge barren expanse of thousands of acres will not have the built in protection of Mother Nature and large gullies will form across their table top, barren expanse, most likely toppling some of their structures.

On April 3rd, 2012 Forbes.com ran a headline: “Collapse of German Solar Companies Threatens California’s Big Solar Projects”. They go on to say “On Monday, Solar Trust of America became the latest solar developer to file for bankruptcy in Delaware federal court”. In another part of the article they say “Solar Trust’s parent company, German developer Solar Millennium, filed for bankruptcy in Germany in December and moved to sell its U.S. pipeline of projects to a German photovoltaic power plant developer called Solarhybrid. Then late last month Solarhybrid itself sought bankruptcy protection, citing a cutback in German subsidies for solar energy.” They go on to say “According to Solar Trust’s bankruptcy filings, the company has liabilities of 20 million dollars and missed a \$1 million rent payment on April 1st to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management.

What happens when Iberdrola, a foreign company, collects their subsidies scrapes off 29,000 or 36,000 acres of our desert then declares bankruptcy, and disappears back into Spain where their corporation is dissolved? Don’t we have this all backwards? Rather than providing billions of dollars in subsidies for foreign companies, shouldn’t we be requiring them to post billions of dollars in an impound account to guarantee their performance? At least when they fail we will have some money to begin the hundred year restoration of our desert.

We ask that you do everything possible to protect our desert from this poorly planned, poorly sited, impractical project which has no purchase or connection agreements.

We send our best regards and our sincere thanks for your time.

Le Hayes, General Manager
Baker Community Services District