



San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society

P. O. Box 10973, San Bernardino, California 92423-0973

February 22, 2015

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



By email to: docket@energy.ca.gov

RE: Comments on the Draft California Desert Renewable Energy Plan (DRECP) and Associated Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report (EIS/EIR)

To Whom It May Concern:

The San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society (SBVAS) is the local chapter of the National Audubon Society for almost all of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, and has about two thousand members in that area. Our chapter area thus covers most of the DRECP area. Our missions are the protection of habitat for birds and other wildlife, and public education about the environment. We are a 501c(3) organization.

In addition to the comments filed by Lozeau Drury and Audubon California on the DRECP, which it hereby supports, SBVAS wishes to point out to the Commission that the Development Focus Area shown on the preferred alternative map as a roughly triangular area to the east of Barstow includes nesting habitat for the state endangered Tricolored Blackbird (*Agelaius tricolor*).

During the 2014 Statewide Survey, 1,200 Tricolored Blackbirds were counted in the vicinity of Newberry Springs east of Barstow in the preferred alternative map area referenced above. They were nesting in two backyard ponds just off Mineola Road and in a third pond near Silver Valley Road about six miles farther east. Much of their foraging was in nearby alfalfa fields where they were able to find an ample supply of insects for successful nesting. The birds were also foraging at small ranches where the Tricolored Blackbirds took advantage of spilled grain for chickens and other livestock. The birds foraged to a more limited degree in the bordering desert habitat.

In the winter, the tricolors joined other blackbird species and foraged in alfalfa, fallow hay fields and at a dairy on Piute Road. In mid-December 2014, about 1,000 Tricolored Blackbirds were seen near Mineola Road by a SBVAS field trip led by Gene Cardiff, indicating that a majority of the birds remain year round.

A banded tricolor was photographed at a ranch in Newberry Springs, providing circumstantial evidence that these birds originated in the Central Valley. The only person banding tricolors is Robert Meese, who only bands in the Central Valley. There is also some genetic evidence that there is limited interchange between southern California and Central Valley populations.

No matter the place of origin of these birds, they constitute a significant portion of the worldwide population, and as such deserve protection. Turning the area into an array of solar farms or wind turbines will further reduce the population of this endangered bird, whose numbers are already in steep decline. We therefore urge the Commission to withdraw the area described as a Development Focus Area.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Drew Feldmann". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned below the word "Sincerely,".

Drew Feldmann
Conservation Chair