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California Energy Commission
DOCKETED
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TN # 74929
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Tuesday, February 17, 2015

Dear Mr. Beale and Supervisor Ramos,

I have been following the DRECP process since its inception, and wish to comment on several aspects of the current version.

My interest and experience in the Mojave Desert spans over 30 years, although my residence in Joshua Tree, + my more passionate involvement in preserving our treasures, spans the last 13 years. I had an interest + connection with the desert as a "getaway" and spiritual refresher during my working life in greater Los Angeles. Following my move to Joshua Tree and subsequent intimate experience with daily life in the desert, I am almost desperate to do everything I can to prevent its diminishment by "a thousand cuts" if the DRECP preferred alternative were to be finalized.

A first point to make is the need for

better communication or even integration with the CEESP. The very idea of energy conservation before proliferation of energy projects is such simple logic. It's hard to understand how the two concepts stand so far apart in our current situation.

Related to conservation is the "next step" issue of small-scale distributed local renewable generation. Clearly an issue of private and localized interest, the value of County support and incentives could reduce the potential damage from inappropriate industrial-scale projects that result in more long-term climate-changing desert damage than renewable energy benefit.

There certainly is some forward progress in the current DREP in terms of protection for some valuable undisturbed lands. Thank you for that. However, there are still many areas open to potential development that should be excluded particularly lands that have been designated through biological analysis to be valid wildlife corridors.

One egregious "grandfathered" project in this category is the Soda Mountain Project. While I realize this project is not therefore a part of this DRECP draft, I respectfully request that through reconsideration or advising, the project be reconfigured for another more disturbed area. The tortoise & bighorn sheep will be grateful! (and water issues are also extremely important here). All three of these concerns - WILDLIFE CORRIDORS, WATER ISSUES, AND A PREFERENCE FOR SITING ON REALLY DISTURBED LANDS, are great concerns of mine. Too little attention to these issues is present in the preferred alternative despite the stated goal of attending to BALANCE on these issues in the Plan.

Time has passed — about 4 years — since the DRECP process began and a huge amount of progress in distributed and rooftop solar development has greatly increased the REAL production of renewable energy in California — YET — the DRECP dialogue rumbles forward without recognizing this. A recalibration is necessary!

An economic factor within the breadth of DRECP machinations is the potential decline of Tourism economies in many desert communities. "The desert is different." "The desert is unique & quiet." "The desert is a respite from bumper-to-bumper traffic & smoggy vistas." These are often-repeated mantras of desert visitors. They don't want to see industrial plants in the desert — they want to see acres of Joshua Trees, a sequence of 4 to 5 mountain silhouettes on the horizon, and gillions of stars at night. Just the dust created from scraping desert lands to create large solar projects jeopardizes the very atmosphere (literal & figurative) for which people travel from California urban areas to experience the respite of clear air & scenic vistas. Towns like Barstow, Joshua Tree and Twentynine Palms absolutely thrive on tourism of this kind. Local communities must be listened to and considered in DRECP — and County — planning processes.

Planning is a process & is never done.
The DRECP should:

1) reassess goals based on renewable energy's increased production in the last 6 years.
2) Remove all wildlife corridors from consideration for development.
3) limit DFAs to very-clearly-already-disturbed lands.
4) Pay attention to the needs of all small communities that depend on ~~[illegible]~~ TOURISM TO THE UNDISTURBED DESERT for their recreation and respite.

Thank you for giving credence & attention to my comment.

LARAINE TURK
PO BOX 305
64024 HOLLINGER RD.
JOSHUA TREE, CA 92252
laraine518@earthlink.net
760.366.0298

Attachment 2. Places that require conservation in the Preferred Alternative of the DRECP

Active sand dunes
Avawatz Mountains (including "Bowling Alley")
Big Maria Mountains and surrounding flats
Bristol Lake (excluding mineral leasing and salt mining areas)
Cadiz Valley/Iron Mountains
Chuckwalla Bench
Coso Range area (including Olancha Dunes - not including OHV area)
Danby Lake
Desert Tortoise Natural Area (ACEC)
Eagle Mountain
Existing critical habitat
Joshua tree woodland habitat
Lower Centennial Flat
Lucerne Valley wildlife linkages
Malpais Mesa (including northwestern Talc City Hills, Santa Rosa flat & Conglomerate Mesa)
Microphyll woodlands
Morongo Basin wildlife linkages
Mule Mountains
Orocopia Mountains area
Palen Lake
Pinto Mountains area
Pisgah Valley (ACEC)
Red Mountain
Riparian areas
Riverside Mountains area
Rodman Mountains area (lands abutting existing Wilderness)
Rose Valley/McCloud Flat (area in DFA)
Sacramento Mountains
Silurian Valley (including BLM Special Analysis Area and additional acreage)
Slate Range
Soda Mountains – south slope
Sperry Hills/Kingston Range
Tehachapi Mountains and Southern Sierras – areas of conservation interest
Valley Mountain
Vidal
Wildlife Linkages
Whipple Mountains area