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CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

In the matter of:

Soda Mountain Solar Project) Docket No. 24-OPT-03
_____)

INFORMATION AND ENVIRONMENTAL SCOPING MEETING
FOR THE PROPOSED SODA MOUNTAIN SOLAR PROJECT

IN-PERSON AT:

HOLIDAY INN EXPRESS - CONFERENCE ROOM

2700 LENWOOD ROAD

BARSTOW, CA 92311

REMOTE ACCESS VIA ZOOM

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2025

1:00 P.M.

Reported by:

Elise Hicks

APPEARANCESCEC COMMISSIONERS

Noemi Gallardo, Lead Commissioner

David Hochschild, Chair

CEC STAFF

Kaycee Chang with the Siting, Transmission, and
Environmental Protection Division

Ryan Young, California Energy Commission, Deputy Public
Advisor

Drew Bohan, California Energy Commission, Executive
Director

APPLICANT

Hannah Arkin, Resolution Environmental, Applicant's
Consultant

PUBLIC COMMENT

Jeff Allen, Battalion Chief, San Bernardino County Fire
Protection District

Greg Bowman, General Manager, City of Baker

Randy Banis, President, Friends of El Mirage

Cameron Mayer

Luke Basulto

Clinton Epps

Laura Cunningham

APPEARANCESPUBLIC COMMENT (cont'd.)

Kevin Emmerich, Co-Founder, Basin & Range Watch

Neal Desai, Senior Pacific Regional Director, National
Parks Conservation Association

Abraham Basulto

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P R O C E E D I N G S

1:06 p.m.

FRIDAY, AUGUST 29, 2025

MS. CHANG: Welcome everyone. My name is Kaycee Chang with the Siting, Transmission, and Environmental Protection Division, or as we like to say, STEP, and I supervise the STEP Division's CEQA project managers. Thank you for attending the CEC-hosted informational and environmental scoping meeting for the proposed Soda Mountain Solar Project.

Commissioner Gallardo will now lead us in the Pledge of Allegiance.

COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Everyone please rise.

(The Pledge of Allegiance is recited.)

MS. CHANG: Thank you, Commissioner.

Next slide, please.

We would like to go over a few logistics. This meeting is hybrid with attendees in person at the Holiday Inn Express and virtual attendees on Zoom. Thank you all for being here. We also thank our Spanish interpreters and court reporter for their assistance today.

For those in the room, the bathrooms are located across the hall. The men's code is 1313 and the women's code is 4545.

For those attending virtually, Zoom closed

1 captioning has been enabled. Attendees can use the service
2 by clicking on the live transcript icon and then choosing
3 either show subtitles or view full transcript. The closed
4 captioning service can be stopped by exiting out of the
5 live transcript or selecting the hide subtitle icon. We
6 have also enabled interpretation on Zoom.

7 For those participating in person, please be
8 mindful of speaking slowly and clearly into the microphone
9 for everyone online to hear, our Spanish interpreters and
10 the court reporter.

11 Finally, this meeting is being recorded. The
12 meeting recording will be made available on the California
13 Energy Commission's website.

14 Next slide, please.

15 This slide provides an overview of today's
16 agenda. We will be sharing information with the public on
17 our Opt-In certification program and process, and the
18 applicant will be sharing information about the proposed
19 project. There will be plenty of opportunities for
20 comments from California Native American tribes, government
21 agencies, elected officials, and interested parties and
22 members of the public. There is a printout in the back of
23 the room of the agenda with our Public Advisor's office.
24 We are fortunate to have with us today our lead siting
25 Commissioner, Noemi Gallardo, who you will hear from

1 shortly.

2 While no decision on this proposed project will
3 occur today, we all look forward to hearing from you. And
4 now I will introduce our Lead Commissioner, Commissioner
5 Gallardo.

6 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Buenas tardes. Good
7 afternoon, everyone. It's wonderful to be here in
8 beautiful Barstow. I want to start with gratitude for all
9 of the Energy Commission staff who set up this public
10 meeting, and also to the staff of the Holiday Inn Express
11 who helped with that setup.

12 So I am Noemi Gallardo, as Kaycee just said. I'm
13 one of the five Commissioners at the California Energy
14 Commission, and the Energy Commission assigns two
15 Commissioners for every policy priority area that we have.
16 There's a Lead Commissioner and an associate Commissioner.

17 So I am the Lead Commissioner on what we call
18 siting, which is the certification and oversight of
19 eligible power generation facilities, including the Opt-In
20 certification program, which is the process that the Soda
21 Mountain project is going through. Chair David Hochschild
22 is the associate Commissioner. Both the Chair and I will
23 be working with staff throughout the review and analysis of
24 the proposed Soda Mountain application, and ultimately he
25 and I will vote along with our fellow Commissioners to

1 approve or deny the project.

2 Right now we are at the beginning of this process
3 and today we are here to learn more about the project.
4 This morning we visited the site of the proposed project in
5 the area of Baker. The site visits aren't required for us
6 to do. However we think it's really important for us to
7 have a firsthand experience of the area so that we can
8 learn more about the surrounding area, the project
9 parameters, the potential impacts, and whatever else we can
10 learn in that firsthand experience. So I would like to
11 thank the applicant, VC Renewables, for facilitating that
12 visit and also for engaging with us in this proceeding.

13 Today the most important job that the Energy
14 Commission has is to learn from all of you. A key
15 criterion that the Commissioners apply when voting on a
16 project is whether we would be confident having that
17 project near our homes and our families. So that's why we
18 treat every project as a unique project, and it is also why
19 it is extremely important for us to hear from local
20 residents.

21 It is also why the staff at the Energy Commission
22 is extremely diligent about doing a thorough and
23 comprehensive job in their independent research analysis
24 and review. And reviewing these applications is a heavy
25 lift, and I know that the staff put a tremendous amount of

1 time and effort into reviewing each application, so I would
2 like to uplift our staff for their dedication and for their
3 professionalism. That includes our siting team, our
4 attorneys, our public advisor representatives, our media
5 leads, our IT experts, and also the advisors to the
6 Commissioners.

7 I would also like to thank our peer agencies like
8 the California Department of Fish and Wildlife for their
9 extensive collaboration on our environmental review. And
10 finally, a big thank you to the City of Barstow and the
11 County of San Bernardino for hosting us and for everyone
12 here in attendance, whether it's in the room or on Zoom.

13 So my Associate Commissioner, Chair David
14 Hochschild, was planning to give remarks. He is currently
15 in a business meeting, and so as soon as he finishes there,
16 he will join us. But his advisor, Caroline, is with us
17 here in the audience.

18 So I will now pass it on to our Deputy Public
19 Advisor, Ryan Young.

20 MR. YOUNG: Good afternoon. Thank you for
21 joining us today. I am Ryan Young, the Energy Commission's
22 Deputy Public Advisor.

23 Today we will have some presentations, hear from
24 government representatives, and then we'll have our main
25 public comment period. I just wanted to mention at the

1 beginning of our time here together a few instructions for
2 later in the day, which I'll repeat again later as well.

3 First, we ask that everyone who would like to
4 make a public comment to turn in their blue card as soon as
5 possible to myself. It looks like this. Online you can
6 use the raise hand function, which I will explain in a
7 little bit here. If you represent a government entity,
8 please indicate that as soon as possible on your blue card
9 and we'll get you up first and without a timer.

10 With that, back to you.

11 MS. CHANG: Thank you, Ryan.

12 Next slide, please.

13 All right. I just want to take one step back and
14 introduce the California Energy Commission, or CEC, or
15 augment what Commissioner Gallardo had said.

16 As you have heard, the CEC is the state's lead
17 agency on energy policy and planning, including leading the
18 100 percent clean energy planning process. We are
19 committed to promoting a clean, affordable, and reliable
20 energy supply for all Californians.

21 Next slide, please.

22 The CEC was created by statute in 1974. We have
23 a variety of functions and work closely with other energy-
24 related agencies, like the California Public Utilities
25 Commission and the California Air Resources Board. Our

1 primary functions include state energy policy, energy
2 efficiency and reliability, and clean energy transition
3 planning and infrastructure.

4 Next slide, please.

5 One of the programs we implement is the Opt-In
6 Certification Program. The goal of today's CEC meeting is
7 to provide an opportunity for interested members of the
8 public, including surrounding communities, to learn about
9 the proposed project and our process. Your comments
10 provided today or in writing to our proposed project docket
11 will be considered for our staff assessment.

12 I will kick it off by providing an overview of
13 the Opt-In Certification Program.

14 Next slide, please.

15 Through Assembly Bill or AB 205, the Opt-In
16 Certification Program provides an optional permitting
17 pathway and a condensed timeline for the types of energy
18 facilities listed here on the slide, and certain
19 transmission lines associated with these generating and
20 storage facilities.

21 Prior to the signing of AB 205, the CEC's
22 permitting authority was limited to thermal power plants
23 with a generating capacity of at least 50 megawatts. AB
24 205 expands the types of facilities that can be certified
25 by the CEC to include solar photovoltaic electrical

1 generating facilities of 50 megawatts or more and energy
2 storage systems of at least 200 megawatt hours, like the
3 Soda Mountain Solar Project. The Opt-In process provides
4 for early tribal consultation, robust public input, and
5 rigorous environmental review.

6 The CEC is a lead agency for the California
7 Environmental Quality Act, or CEQA, and is charged with
8 preparing the staff assessment, which includes a draft
9 environmental impact report. We will discuss the contents
10 later in our presentation.

11 Next slide, please.

12 We don't do this alone. We consult with our
13 state partner agencies, including the California Department
14 of Fish and Wildlife, the State Water Resources Control
15 Board and the applicable Regional Water Quality Control
16 Board, and the Department of Toxic Substances and Control.
17 We are also coordinating with Bureau of Land Management.

18 Next slide, please.

19 CEC certification or approval of an application
20 requires the CEC find that the construction or operation of
21 the proposed project will have an overall net positive
22 economic benefit to the local government that would have
23 had permitting authority over the site and related
24 facility. That the applicant has entered into one or more
25 legally binding and enforceable agreements with, or that

1 benefit, a coalition of one or more community-based
2 organizations.

3 At the stage of application completion, where we
4 are now with the Soda Mountain Solar Project, the applicant
5 submitted the required Community Benefits Plan in its
6 application, which concluded a timeline for execution. An
7 actual Community Benefits Agreement is not necessary for
8 application completeness, but the applicant must provide
9 additional information updating or supplementing the
10 information in the application no later than 45 days after
11 an application is deemed complete.

12 The CEC must also find that the applicant will
13 use a skilled and trained workforce and pay construction
14 workers at least prevailing wages, subject to statutory
15 enforcement or a project labor agreement.

16 The CEC must also find that the proposed project
17 will comply with all applicable laws, ordinances,
18 regulations, and standards, or LORS, or the CEC must find
19 that despite a non-conformance with state, regional, or
20 local LORS, the proposed project is required for public
21 convenience and necessity and there are not more prudent
22 and feasible means of achieving public convenience and
23 necessity. In making the determination, the CEC considers
24 the impacts of the facility on the environment, consumer
25 benefits, and electric system reliability, among other

1 factors.

2 Any significant effects on the project must be
3 avoided or substantially lessened, or the CEC must adopt a
4 statement of overriding considerations for significant
5 effects found infeasible to avoid or mitigate. This list
6 of requirements is not exhaustive and based on the project
7 other requirements may apply.

8 Next slide, please.

9 This slide shows a timeline for our process.
10 This application was deemed complete on July 31st, 2025,
11 which started our 270-day schedule, and today we are
12 hosting the informational and scoping meeting. We are
13 actively working on the staff assessment, which includes a
14 draft environmental impact report, or EIR, working towards
15 Day 150, the day we are to file the document. We will then
16 host a public meeting on the staff assessment 30 to 60 days
17 after filing. The updated staff assessment would be
18 published at least 30 days prior to a publicly noticed CEC
19 business meeting at which the CEC will render its decision,
20 and that is to be 270 days after the application is deemed
21 complete or as soon as practicable thereafter.

22 Next slide, please.

23 We want to mention that our work does not stop at
24 Day 270. If the proposed project is approved by the
25 Commission, the proposed project then goes to our

1 Compliance, Monitoring, and Enforcement Unit, who ensures
2 the facilities comply with all provisions in their
3 associated certification. They also analyze any proposed
4 changes to the design, operation, or performance. The team
5 performs both formal inspections and unannounced
6 inspections, review monthly and annual compliance reports,
7 and investigate complaints.

8 Next slide, please.

9 For more information about the Opt- In program,
10 please visit our webpage.

11 I will now invite the Soda Mountain Solar LLC's
12 project manager, Hannah Arkin, to the podium for the
13 presentation of the proposed Soda Mountain Solar project.

14 Next slide, please.

15 MS. ARKIN: Thank you, Kaycee.

16 Good afternoon. My name is Hannah Arkin. I'm
17 with Resolution Environmental, and I'm the project director
18 for the Soda Mountain Solar Project. I'd like to first
19 start by thanking the CEC staff and Commissioners for all
20 the hard work that goes into the AB 205 Opt-In project.

21 Next slide, please.

22 The Soda Mountain Solar Project proposes to
23 construct, operate, and maintain a utility-scale solar
24 photovoltaic electrical generating and storage facility and
25 associated infrastructure to generate and deliver renewable

1 electricity to the statewide electrical transmission grid.
2 The project includes future decommissioning, which is
3 anticipated to occur after 40 years of operation.

4 The project is located on approximately 2,670
5 acres of land administered by the U.S. Department of
6 Interior Bureau of Land Management. The project would
7 generate up to 300 megawatts of renewable energy and
8 includes up to 300 megawatts of battery storage.

9 Next slide, please.

10 The project is located entirely on federal land
11 approximately six miles southwest of Baker. The project is
12 bounded directly to the east by the Mojave National
13 Preserve, which is administered by the National Park
14 Service, in BLM lands, including the Rasor Off-Highway
15 Vehicle Recreation Area to the southeast corner.

16 Interstate 15 and the former Arrowhead Trail
17 Highway runs along the western boundary of the project
18 site. The Rasor Road Services Shell Oil gas station is
19 located off the I-15 southwest of the project site along
20 the access road to the project site.

21 Rasor Road, which is an unimproved BLM public
22 access road, traverses through the project site from west
23 to east to the Rasor OHV recreational area. Arrowhead
24 Trail is an unimproved BLM road, which goes north through
25 the project site.

1 The project site is located within a designated
2 federal section 368 energy corridor adjacent to the I-15.

3 Next slide, please.

4 The project site is composed of rural desert land
5 and is almost entirely undeveloped. The power produced by
6 the project would be conveyed to the regional electrical
7 grid through an interconnection with the existing Mead-
8 Adelanto 500 kilovolt transmission line, which is operated
9 by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power. The
10 project site was selected because the Bureau of Land
11 Management issued a record of decision and associated
12 amendment and approval for the project to build a solar
13 facility in 2016. CDFW has an agreement with the high-
14 speed rail, which will be in the median of the I-15, to
15 build a wildlife crossing in the area to the north of the
16 project site.

17 Next slide, please.

18 The Soda Mountain proposal is, again, to
19 construct, operate, maintain, and decommission a 300-
20 megawatt photovoltaic solar and 300-megawatt battery energy
21 storage facility. Construction and operation would result
22 in the disturbance of approximately 2,059 acres of the
23 2,670-acre site. However the applicant team has
24 voluntarily opted to implement refined construction
25 technology that significantly reduced the project

1 footprints. This precision grading technology is
2 conditioned as a mitigation measure, which results in
3 approximately 230 acres of impact, which allows for the
4 preservation of biological resources, habitat, flora,
5 fauna, reduced water usage and dust control, and increases
6 worker safety health by reducing exposure to valley fever.

7 In 2015 an EIR-EIS was prepared again by the
8 Bureau of Land Management in the County of San Bernardino,
9 and the Bureau of Land Management adopted a project.

10 If we can move to the next slide.

11 In this graphic, you can see the applicant's
12 preferred project, which was proposed in 2015, would
13 construct a 2,558-acre renewable energy development, not
14 the 2,058-acre project that today is proposed. The project
15 footprint was reduced by the Bureau of Land Management with
16 their approval to build a solar facility in 2015
17 specifically to address impacts to the desert bighorn
18 sheep. Therefore, the project presented in the Opt-In
19 application today has already provided a significant
20 reduction in the original project footprint specifically,
21 again, to reduce impacts to the desert bighorn sheep.

22 Next slide, please.

23 The proposed project components are as follows.

24 Number one, the solar plant site. This includes
25 all the facilities that create a footprint in and around

1 the field of solar panels, including the solar field, which
2 consists of solar power arrays identified as 1, 2, 3, and
3 4, the operation and maintenance buildings and structures,
4 stormwater infrastructure, and related infrastructure and
5 improvements.

6 The second project component is a substation and
7 switch yard for interconnection into the existing
8 transmission system. Tying into an existing transmission
9 system that has capacity for the project reduces the need
10 to construct any off-site linear transmission facilities
11 and reduces environmental impacts for the project.

12 The third project component is the gen-tie line
13 connecting the project substation switch yard and the 500
14 KV Mead-Adelanto line.

15 And the fourth component is our 300 megawatt of
16 battery energy storage system, which occurs across 18
17 acres. When the project is operational, it will operate 24
18 hours a day year-round and would generate electricity
19 during daylight hours when the sun is shining.

20 Next slide, please.

21 Construction of the project is anticipated to
22 begin in the second quarter of 2026 and occur over
23 approximately 18 months. Once construction is complete,
24 the project would operate for approximately 40 years.
25 Construction is anticipated to generate an average of 200

1 construction workers that will be on-site daily with a
2 maximum anticipation of 300 workers during the peak
3 construction activities. The project is anticipated to
4 generate a maximum of 600 daily vehicle trips from
5 construction workers, 200 daily vehicle trips from heavy
6 trucks, and 34 vehicle trips from water trucks. The water
7 for the project would be supplied from up to five newly
8 constructed on-site groundwater wells, or alternatively or
9 in addition from existing private off-site groundwater
10 wells.

11 Next slide, please.

12 The project would begin operation in 2027 and
13 operate seven days a week, 365 days, with approximately a
14 40-year anticipated lifespan. The project substation and
15 all components of the project would be uncrewed during
16 operation and when the project reaches the end of its
17 useful life, the structures and equipment would be removed
18 for reuse or recycle, and land would be reclaimed. A
19 decommissioning and site reclamation plan has been prepared
20 as part of the project.

21 Next slide, please.

22 The project's needed to support the long-term
23 clean energy reliability of the state and provides a zero-
24 emitting power generation paired with battery energy
25 storage. Our project supports the state's greenhouse gas

1 emission reduction targets for 2030 and the state goal of
2 100 percent zero carbon electricity resources by 2045. The
3 project would connect to the existing LADWP Mead-Adelanto
4 transmission line which has ample unused capacity and the
5 battery storage component increases the grid and generation
6 reliability, dispatchability, and stability. We look
7 forward to providing the capacity needed to support the
8 decommissioning of existing thermal and nuclear power
9 plants and helping the state meet its green energy goals.

10 That concludes my presentation. Thank you.

11 MS. CHANG: Thank you, Hannah.

12 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Hannah, I had a few
13 questions if you're willing to take them.

14 MS. ARKIN: Yes. Absolutely.

15 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Thank you. Could you
16 tell us how many solar panels it would take?

17 MS. ARKIN: It will be thousands of PV panels.
18 Kyle, off the top of your head?

19 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Just an estimate would
20 help. For those online, we're asking someone who's in the
21 audience.

22 UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: 600 to 700,000 panels.

23 MS. ARKIN: 600 to 700,000 panels.

24 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Okay, and can you also
25 tell us what type of batteries would be used for the energy

1 sources?

2 MS. ARKIN: Tesla Megapack 2XL or an equivalent.

3 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Okay. And then can you
4 also tell us how many jobs there would be? I think
5 permanent jobs. I think you may have had it on the screen
6 but it was small writing.

7 MS. ARKIN: Yeah.

8 Could you scroll back a little bit?

9 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: The next one.

10 MS. ARKIN: Off the top of my head, the
11 recollection is 300 construction jobs and 32 permanent
12 long-term. Yes. But we can verify that and follow up to
13 ensure it's docketed as part of our socioeconomic report.

14 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Excellent. Thank you. I
15 appreciate it.

16 Yes. That's it.

17 MS. CHANG: Thank you, Hannah.

18 All right. Can we please go to the slide for the
19 staff assessment? Thank you.

20 All right. Now that you have heard about the
21 Opt-In process and from the applicant on the project
22 description, I will cover the CEC's preparation of a staff
23 assessment for the proposed Soda Mountain Solar Project.

24 I'd like to make a couple of points up front.
25 First, although we were engaged in the data review of the

1 application with the applicant from August 2024 until the
2 end of July 2025, CEC staff's actual analysis work is still
3 in its early stages. That's why we are here engaged in
4 project scoping efforts. As part of staff's independent
5 information gathering, we are looking for input on the
6 scope of what our CEQA analysis should include.

7 Second, while this is an accelerated process, a
8 complete and independent environmental analysis will be
9 conducted.

10 Next slide, please.

11 The purpose of the staff assessment is to provide
12 objective information regarding the proposed project's
13 significant effects on the environment; identify possible
14 ways to minimize the significant effects; describe a range
15 of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project, their
16 feasibility, and their comparative merit; assess the
17 proposed project's conformance with applicable local,
18 state, and federal laws, ordinances, regulations, and
19 standards; and provide an evaluation of the extent to which
20 the application complies with additional licensing
21 requirements set forth in the public resources code. This
22 information will be considered by the CEC Commissioners in
23 deciding whether to grant a certificate to build and
24 operate the proposed project.

25 Next slide, please.

1 The CEC has an interdisciplinary team of
2 technical specialists and will prepare a staff assessment.
3 A staff assessment is an independent technical and
4 environmental review prepared by the CEC that is more
5 comprehensive than a typical EIR. The staff assessment
6 includes a Draft EIR following the requirements of CEQA and
7 the CEQA guidelines.

8 In the next two slides, we will show the topics
9 in the environmental and engineering impact analyses and
10 some mandatory Opt-In requirements that are included in the
11 staff assessment. The environmental justice assessment
12 includes an analysis of the proposed project's impact on an
13 environmental justice population based on the presence of a
14 minority or low-income population and considers whether the
15 proposed project would have a disproportionately high or
16 adverse human health or environmental effect on that
17 population. And finally, the staff assessment will include
18 compliance conditions and a compliance monitoring plan.

19 This is to ensure that, should the project be
20 approved, construction, operation, and decommissioning
21 complies with applicable local, state, and federal laws,
22 ordinances, regulations, and standards, and complies with
23 all conditions of certification.

24 Next slide, please.

25 These are the topics that our CEC technical team

1 of engineers and environmental specialists are analyzing to
2 produce a staff assessment. The topics incorporate those
3 in Appendix G, the environmental checklist of the CEQA
4 guidelines, and include other topics required by the Public
5 Resources Code. The staff assessment will also evaluate a
6 range of reasonable alternatives to the proposed project.

7 In addition to a no-project alternative, the
8 staff assessment will consider alternatives that avoid or
9 substantially lessen the proposed project's significant
10 effects while feasibly attaining most of the proposed
11 project objectives.

12 Next slide, please.

13 The staff assessment will also include an
14 evaluation of the proposed project's compliance with
15 mandatory Opt-In requirements, which includes skilled
16 workforce requirements, a community benefits agreement, and
17 demonstration that the proposed project will provide a net
18 positive economic benefit to the local government that
19 would have had permitting authority.

20 Next slide, please.

21 The CEC sent a Notice of Preparation, or NOP, of
22 a Draft EIR to analyze the potential environmental impacts
23 of the proposed project to the State Clearinghouse, and
24 mailed the NOP to the trustee agency, San Bernardino County
25 Clerk, local, regional, and federal agencies, including

1 those who commented on the previous California Department
2 of Fish and Wildlife NOP. Our NOP is viewable on the
3 proposed project docket and details several topic areas of
4 probable environmental effects. This slide shows the
5 topics we have identified at this point as having a
6 probable significant effect.

7 However, as we are still early in analysis phase,
8 additional effects may be identified. This will all be
9 fleshed out in the Draft EIR. The next five slides
10 identify some key concerns that staff has identified thus
11 far for biological resources, geology, water, and worker
12 safety fire protection, which includes battery safety.

13 Next slide, please.

14 The proposed project is located on natural lands
15 in the Mojave Desert that support a variety of native
16 vegetation and wildlife. Some of the probable
17 environmental effects regarding biological resources that
18 could occur from the construction and operation of the
19 proposed project include loss of habitat and potential loss
20 or mortality to small numbers of desert tortoise, loss of
21 habitat for or disruption of breeding burrowing owls,
22 interference of movement or disturbance to desert bighorn
23 sheep, and disturbance to desert kit fox and American
24 badger.

25 Next slide, please.

1 The proposed project would also be expected to
2 disrupt nesting for common and special status birds, remove
3 habitat, and restrict movement for some species of
4 wildlife. The project area overlaps and is adjacent to
5 important foraging, lambing, and dispersal habitat for
6 desert bighorn sheep. CEC staff is gathering information
7 and conducting analysis to determine appropriate avoidance
8 buffers and minimization measures to protect sheep and
9 reduce potential impacts to desert bighorn sheep movement
10 and dispersal corridors.

11 The site is also located in an area that supports
12 numerous ephemeral drainages, which would be subject to
13 disturbance during construction. During operation, noise,
14 glare from solar panels and ongoing maintenance can also
15 adversely affect the use of habitat by a variety of
16 species, including desert bighorn sheep, desert tortoise,
17 burrowing owls, numerous desert and migratory birds, and
18 other sensitive wildlife.

19 Next slide, please.

20 The proposed project is sited on desert alluvial
21 fans that drain the adjacent Soda Mountains. During
22 construction, excavation, grading, and soil compaction
23 could increase sediment and soil erosion. Staff will
24 evaluate how sediment and soil erosion will be affected by
25 the project and mitigation.

1 CEC staff have asked the applicant to complete a
2 preliminary site-specific geotechnical investigation. The
3 geotechnical investigation will collect data at the project
4 site and evaluate the potential risks from geologic
5 hazards.

6 For example, the geotechnical investigation will
7 evaluate the potential for surface fault rupture, strong
8 seismic ground shaking, liquefaction, and landslides. The
9 geotechnical investigation will propose design, grading,
10 and construction methods to mitigate these and other
11 potential geologic hazards.

12 Next slide, please.

13 The project proposes a berm along the project
14 perimeter to divert stormwater runoff from alluvial fans
15 around the site, three drainage channels between the solar
16 array fields, and approximately 10 temporary sediment
17 basins adjacent to the drainage channels and throughout the
18 project site. CEC staff will evaluate the adequacy of this
19 mitigation. The proposed project water supply would be via
20 groundwater extraction from an undeveloped groundwater sub-
21 basin. Staff will review proposed groundwater
22 characterization measures, and if they are not found to be
23 adequate, additional certification conditions may be
24 necessary.

25 The project proposes to construct a number of at-

1 grade ephemeral stream crossings to maintain existing flow
2 and sediment transport in compliance with Regional Water
3 Quality Control Board requirements.

4 Next slide, please.

5 The CEC will review the history of battery energy
6 storage systems, or BESS, fire incidents, and the evolving
7 strategies for BESS safety. The applicant has proposed a
8 battery storage system that is in containers and would use
9 lithium iron phosphate batteries. The worker safety fire
10 protection section of the staff assessment will also
11 consider potential impacts and available mitigation
12 measures for the transporting of the battery storage
13 containers to the proposed project site.

14 Next slide, please.

15 As mentioned, the CEC is in the early stages of
16 analysis of the proposed project now that the proposed
17 project application is complete. Staff will use the
18 information gathered during this scoping process in the
19 preparation of the staff assessment. For example, we have
20 a court reporter transcribing today's meeting who will
21 capture any verbal comments made today.

22 With certain exceptions, the staff assessment is
23 prepared within 150 days of the application completeness
24 determination. The staff assessment is anticipated to be
25 published in December of 2025 and there will be a 60-day

1 public review period. The CEC will come back and hold a
2 public meeting during that period and following the close
3 of the 60-day public comment review period, staff may
4 prepare and publish an updated staff assessment and file
5 the CEC Executive Director's recommendation on whether the
6 CEC should issue a certificate to build and operate the
7 project. A CEC decision on the proposed project will be
8 made at a publicly noticed CEC business meeting.

9 And now I will turn it over to Ryan Young, our
10 Deputy Public Advisor.

11 MR. YOUNG: Good afternoon again, everyone.
12 Today I will be presenting on how members of the public,
13 California Native American tribes, and others can
14 participate in this proceeding.

15 Next slide, please.

16 I'm with the Office of Public Advisor, Energy
17 Equity, and Tribal Affairs. Part of our mission is to
18 facilitate public and tribal engagement in CEC programs and
19 policies. We are a free resource available to anyone that
20 wants to participate in CEC proceedings, including this
21 one. I'll be sharing our contact information on a later
22 slide.

23 Next slide, please.

24 Now I'm going to talk about different ways to
25 participate in the CEC's proceedings. There are multiple

1 ways you can participate. The first is to just follow the
2 proceeding, another is to comment in the proceeding, and
3 the third option available to California Native American
4 tribes is tribal consultation.

5 Next slide, please.

6 I will now go into more detail on how to follow
7 the proceeding. One of our most popular ways to
8 participate in our programs and policies is to just follow
9 them. You can follow our proceedings by reviewing
10 materials we post on the website, sign up for email
11 updates, and by attending events like this one here today.
12 Our events are almost always hybrid or virtual via Zoom, so
13 the public can attend our events from anywhere with a phone
14 or internet connection.

15 On this slide, you'll see a snapshot of the CEC
16 webpage for this project. It has information on the
17 proposed project and event status. It has a place where
18 you can subscribe for free email updates under the
19 subscribe button. There's a link to submit written
20 comments directly to the project docket and a link to the
21 entire project docket itself. Now, what is a docket?

22 Next slide, please.

23 The CEC has publicly accessible online dockets
24 for our proceedings. It's essentially a place where
25 application materials, public comments, notices, agendas,

1 and other documents are filed and available online. On
2 this slide, you'll see an image of the docket for the
3 proposed project. With few exceptions, all materials in
4 the docket are linked and available to anyone to download
5 and view for free.

6 Next slide, please.

7 Another way to participate is to comment. As in
8 all of our projects and programs and policies, any person
9 can comment verbally at a CEC event or in writing. Please
10 note, comments are part of the public record with access
11 available via internet search engine.

12 Now to comment verbally, you'll just attend any
13 event and wait for the instructions during the public
14 comment period. For our hybrid events you can comment in
15 person or via Zoom or by phone. Coming up on our agenda is
16 going to be just such a public comment period.

17 We also welcome written comments. As I stated on
18 the CEC website, we have what's called a docket for each
19 project proceeding. Written comments can be submitted to
20 the docket for any time, but the most effective time to do
21 so is when there's an announced public comment period. On
22 our website, you can submit a comment electronically just
23 by typing it into our e-comment page or uploading a
24 document such as a letter. We also have email and paper
25 options to submit a comment that are detailed in the notice

1 for today's event.

2 If you need assistance commenting, you can
3 contact my office, the Office of the Public Advisor, Energy
4 Equity and Title Affairs, and I'll have our contact
5 information on the last slide.

6 Next slide, please.

7 The CEC invites tribal consultations in this and
8 other proceedings. The CEC has been conducting tribal
9 consultations for this project. Gabriel Roark from the CEC
10 Siding Division is available for inquiries or other
11 communications from California Native American tribes.

12 Next slide, please.

13 Thank you again for attending this event and your
14 interest in this proceeding. We're here to serve the state
15 of California, and your participation helps us do our jobs.
16 I put my contact information on this last slide. My office
17 is available to assist you in participating in our programs
18 and policies.

19 And just a reminder, please turn in your blue
20 cards when you want to make a public comment.

21 Thank you.

22 And I'll next turn to the public comment period
23 itself.

24 So we welcome public comment at this time. We
25 will start with commenters joining us in person, and then

1 we'll transition to our online and phone attendees. If you
2 are joining us from person, again, please turn in a blue
3 card.

4 Jeff Allen, would you please approach the podium?
5 You're going to spell your name for the record, and you're
6 invited to share your affiliation and position on the
7 project, if any, and then you may begin. We're asking for
8 comments to be two minutes or less. There'll be a timer on
9 the screen. You may begin whenever you're ready.

10 MR. ALLEN: Good afternoon, everyone. My name is
11 Jeff Allen. I am a Battalion Chief for the San Bernardino
12 County Fire Protection District, and as it relates to the
13 project, the area where this proposed project is going to
14 go is in my battalion.

15 If you're not aware, the County of San Bernardino
16 is the largest county in the nation, and our fire district
17 is also the largest fire district in the nation. We have
18 one fire station in the area in Baker that serves just over
19 4,000 square miles. There's four firemen there every day
20 on one fire engine, and there's an ambulance, and those are
21 not firefighters. There's paramedics there. However, they
22 have a huge response area.

23 And considering where this project is going, it's
24 relatively close to Baker, considering where they go on a
25 daily basis. They cover 100 miles of Interstate 15 from

1 Minneola Road to the Nevada State Line. They go out
2 Highway 127 to the Dumont Dunes, across the Mojave Preserve
3 to Kelbaker Road to the I-40. And at any given moment,
4 they could be in one of those areas. So even though this
5 project is close to Baker, there's a chance they could not
6 even be in Baker if there's an incident.

7 So response times in this area are extremely
8 delayed at times. The particular station in Baker runs
9 about 1,200 calls a year of all risk calls, fires, HAZMATS,
10 emergencies, floods. If you look out the window, there was
11 a flood out here three days ago.

12 The entire Interstate 15 corridor and the I-40
13 corridor is a moving city. Thousands and thousands and
14 thousands of cars every day are moving up and down this
15 freeway. Commerce, hazardous materials, you name it. And
16 so the station in Baker is tasked with a large
17 responsibility. This project will impact the need for
18 service for us out there.

19 I noticed that there'll be an increase in
20 construction workers if approved when it's being built, and
21 so you'll have those folks traveling on the freeway, all
22 the different construction materials, all an impact to our
23 services should somebody need help.

24 Let me refer to my notes. There's also an off-
25 highway vehicle area off of Rasor Road that will have

1 thousands of people in it on the weekends, especially
2 during OHV riding season, which is going to start here
3 pretty soon in October. Again, delayed response times.
4 This project is in that area. We could be handling an
5 incident at the dunes, you could have an incident at the
6 solar facility, and you could wait for an hour, two, three
7 hours for help. It does happen out here.

8 Obviously our priority is always lives, property,
9 and the environment. So we work very hard out here to make
10 sure we're handling that. However, again, we're resource
11 deficient. The town of Baker is a small town. Property,
12 we're funded on property tax, and the freeway is kind of
13 our moving city, like I mentioned. We work collaboratively
14 with the Highway Patrol to make sure that we keep the
15 freeway open when we do have incidents out here, because
16 that is minimizing the impact and the commerce and all of
17 that moving city that's traveling to primarily Nevada and
18 Las Vegas.

19 So just a little tidbit, we did have a battery
20 incident on the Interstate 15 on July 26th of 2024. A
21 battery was being hauled on an 18-wheeler. It ended up
22 tipping over just north of Afton Road. You drove through
23 there this morning. It caused a full closure of the north
24 and the southbound 15 for two full days. The resulting
25 impact of that was a massive backup of traffic, which is

1 our moving city, again. Thousands and thousands of people
2 stranded on the freeway, then having heat emergencies,
3 vehicle fires, you name it. So there was a significant
4 need for our help out here during that two-day event. So a
5 facility like this could have that potential to have some
6 sort of incident like that in the future with one of these
7 BESS systems.

8 Just to give you a little bit of numbers on what
9 just travels through here on a daily basis. So it's the
10 regional -- we did a regional analysis for domestic trade
11 for Clark County, San Bernardino County, Riverside, L.A.,
12 Ventura, and Orange County. It was through a company
13 called Applied Analysis. And the impacts to those six
14 counties during an I-15 freeway shutdown is roughly \$2.5
15 million per hour of lost revenue, \$15.2 million during a
16 six-hour period, and \$121.6 million for a two-day period.
17 So the impacts to the closing of the freeway are
18 significant.

19 So as I mentioned, just keep in mind that we just
20 have one fire station in Baker. At any given time, they
21 could not be there. They could be hundreds of miles -- 80,
22 100 miles away on another incident.

23 So we've already had traffic collision out there
24 today. The other day, we had three semi-truck fires in one
25 day. And the day before, we had a fatality car accident in

1 Mountain Pass. So they are extremely busy.

2 And my Deputy Chief Martin Serna is online. If
3 he has a question, I'm sure he'll raise his hand or wants
4 to speak.

5 But that's all I have. Thank you.

6 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Before we move forward,
7 Mr. Allen, thank you so much for joining us. First of all,
8 we really appreciate it when we can hear local insight, and
9 so this is really helpful for me and for the staff as well.

10 Could you repeat what you said about how many
11 folks are at the fire station at a time?

12 MR. ALLEN: So our normal daily staffing is one
13 four-person paramedic engine company with four
14 firefighters.

15 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Okay.

16 MR. ALLEN: The ambulance -- those are not
17 firefighters. Those are non-safety personnel. Those are
18 one ambulance operator, EMT, who drives, and one ambulance
19 operator paramedic.

20 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Okay. Thanks. And have
21 you had conversations with the applicant, VC Renewables?

22 MR. ALLEN: Very informally via email. Nothing
23 specific. Most of the conversations from the County Fire
24 District side are still in the fire prevention approval
25 plans approval process, so once they get through their

1 processes, then I would begin to engage with them. Because
2 I'm on the 911 emergency side of this. So once the project
3 is in place or is approved, then we would work to try to
4 come up with plans. Okay, if something happens here, what
5 are we going to do? But we have to wait till it's approved
6 first.

7 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Okay. Excellent.

8 We have noticed in our proceedings, whether it's
9 this type of application through Opt-In, we have other
10 types of application processes. It is really helpful when
11 the local fire departments are talking with the developers,
12 so I would encourage both the developer to reach out and
13 for you, if you're willing and able.

14 And I realize, you know, timing is a thing. And
15 I know you come in at a certain point. But it's really
16 helpful to us as well to know, you know, what's happening
17 and get status. But for most importantly, for you all to
18 be in close contact.

19 MR. ALLEN: Absolutely. I already have an email
20 from Hannah.

21 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Excellent.

22 MR. ALLEN: So we're moving forward.

23 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Glad to hear that.

24 All right. And then, since we're on this topic,
25 though, did the other person you mentioned want to speak

1 now?

2 MR. ALLEN: I would assume not, unless he's
3 raised his hand. Chief Serna, if you're online, if you had
4 a question, they're asking.

5 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: So Deputy Public Advisor,
6 can you check and see if anyone is raising their hand?
7 Otherwise, we can take it later. But I just thought since
8 we're on this topic.

9 MR. ALLEN: I'm pretty sure I covered what he --

10 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Okay.

11 MR. YOUNG: Mr. Serna is not raising his hand at
12 the moment.

13 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Okay. Thank you for
14 checking. All right. Again, really appreciate you being
15 here and for sharing.

16 MR. ALLEN: Appreciate it.

17 MR. YOUNG: Thank you. Before we take comments
18 from the interested members of the public in the room, I'm
19 going to quickly transition to Zoom, where we believe we
20 have a governmental commenter, Greg Bowman.

21 If you could please unmute on your end, we're
22 opening your line. You're going to your name for the
23 record and are invited to share your affiliation and
24 position on the project.

25 You can begin your comment whenever you're ready.

1 MR. BOWMAN: Yes. Hi. It's Greg Bowman. Do you
2 want me to spell it for you?

3 MR. YOUNG: Please. Thank you.

4 MR. BOWMAN: It's G-R-E-G, last name Bowman,
5 B-O-W-M-A-N. And I am the General Manager for the City of
6 Baker.

7 As far as Baker is concerned, well, I just had a
8 meeting with one of the guys involved with this. I can't
9 remember his name at the moment, but he assured us they
10 weren't using any wells on site there. He said they were
11 just going to be trucking water in. But it sounds like
12 they are going to be putting wells there.

13 So our biggest concern down here as a town -- you
14 know, we have 700 to 800 people in our population, plus a
15 huge amount of traffic. We got gas stations and food spots
16 and all that stuff. You know, out here in the middle of
17 the desert, we've had pretty good luck so far. I don't
18 know how often wells dry up but just pushing it with
19 however much I imagine to clean those and whatever all the
20 water usage is for up there, it's going to be quite a bit
21 of water usage for whatever wells they come out with. So
22 our biggest concern is that, just trying to keep the water
23 usage to a minimum around here, just to keep, so we have
24 our water. So that's just a big -- biggest part of our
25 concern with up there.

1 So we'd have to go oppose this publicly for the
2 record. But that's about all I got to say.

3 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: And before we proceed,
4 this is Commissioner Gallardo again.

5 So Mr. Bowman, thank you so much for joining us
6 and for sharing your insight. You mentioned that you had
7 talked to someone, and so I assume that's the applicant,
8 someone from the applicant's team?

9 MR. BOWMAN: Yeah.

10 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Just want to make sure
11 we're clear.

12 MR. BOWMAN: Yeah. I believe so. I had his
13 card. I can't find it. I looked, but yeah, I can't quite
14 remember.

15 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: That's okay. Okay. No,
16 that's okay. I just want to make sure we clarified that it
17 was the applicant's team.

18 And we did go out there, as I had mentioned
19 earlier, I'm not sure if you had heard me, but we stopped
20 at one of the gas stations and we did see the Beyond Space
21 Jerky. So we got a close look there, trying to gain a
22 better understanding of the area where the project is
23 proposed to be sited. So again, thank you for sharing.

24 And because the applicant is here in the
25 audience, I'm looking at them and asking for them to ensure

1 that there's a lot of communication also with the locals.
2 And they're nodding yes. So just wanted to let you know
3 that.

4 MR. BOWMAN: Awesome.

5 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: I also want to note for
6 the record that Chair David Hochschild has entered the
7 room.

8 Chair, do you want to give comments now or do you
9 want to wait?

10 CHAIR HOCHSCHILD: Just wanted to say I apologize
11 for being late. We had a Commission meeting which just
12 concluded, so happy to be here.

13 MR. YOUNG: I'm going to transition back to the
14 room for our members of the public.

15 Randy Banis, please approach the podium. Spell
16 your name for the record. You're invited to share your
17 affiliation and position on the project, and you may begin.
18 We're asking for comments to be three minutes or less.
19 There'll be a timer on the screen and you can begin
20 whenever you're ready.

21 MR. BANIS: Good afternoon Commissioners and
22 staff. My name is Randy Banis, R-A-N-D-Y B-A-N-I-S.

23 I'm president of Friends of El Mirage. We're a
24 non-profit organization that works with the Bureau of Land
25 Management to help in the management of off-highway vehicle

1 recreation on BLM managed lands.

2 About 10 years ago, I was the representative for
3 off-highway vehicle recreation to the DRECP stakeholder
4 committee, so I'm very familiar with the partnership
5 between the CEC and the BLM with respect to development of
6 renewable energy in the California desert and its impacts
7 on other land uses, potential impacts. I was also an
8 architect of the California Desert Conservation and
9 Recreation Act, which proposed to protect the Rasor Off-
10 Highway Vehicle Recreation Area. That bill took many
11 sessions of Congress before it eventually passed in 2019 as
12 a part of the Dingell Act.

13 So having gone through a long process of working
14 very hard to see the Rasor Off-Highway Vehicle Area
15 protected for public uses for off-highway vehicle
16 recreation, I'm now happy that we've connected with the
17 project. We're looking to enter into a Community Benefit
18 Agreement to provide visitor amenities to the Rasor Off-
19 Highway Vehicle Area. It has no picnic tables, sun shades,
20 really has no visitor amenities at all. This would be, I
21 think, helpful to those that recreate there and enjoy it.
22 I think that the off-highway vehicle users are ready to be
23 good neighbors to the project, and I believe the project is
24 ready to be good neighbors to the off-highway vehicle users
25 as well.

1 So just wanted to state my involvement and hope
2 that I can be of help in the process.

3 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Thank you so much.
4 Appreciate you being here.

5 MR. BANIS: Thank you.

6 MR. YOUNG: Before I transition back to the Zoom,
7 I want to offer a last invitation for anybody in the room
8 that would like to make a public comment.

9 Please remember to state your name for the
10 record.

11 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: While we wait for the
12 public comment, also want to put into the record that our
13 Executive Director, Drew Bohan, has also joined.

14 Drew, would you like to make any remarks?

15 MR. YOUNG: So again, spell your name for the
16 record, and you can begin any time.

17 MR. MAYER: Cameron Mayer, C-A-M-E-R-O-N
18 M-A-Y-E-R, and I'm a resident of Shoshone, California,
19 about 57 miles north of Baker, and I'd just like to state

20 I'm not against renewable energy. I think there
21 are some really beneficial projects, and if they're sited
22 appropriately, can have benefits. And I also see the need
23 for California to meet its renewable energy goals and
24 combat climate change. Though I do have some concerns with
25 this particular project, I do appreciate, as was said

1 before, the Community Benefit Agreement with groups that
2 are local, the mitigations that have taken place, and the
3 outreach that has been done.

4 But I would like to question the need for it to
5 be in a largely undeveloped area. You know, that doesn't
6 seem very consistent with the goals of California in
7 combating climate change. If you're essentially disturbing
8 lands to save it, it seems like kind of a contradiction.

9 Furthermore with regard to bighorn sheep, I do
10 appreciate what has been done. I hope more potentially
11 could be done if this project is approved. However, I
12 would like to state that from my experience, what I've
13 seen, what I've heard when talking to folks who are on the
14 ground doing the research, that regardless of what
15 mitigations are done, this will have a detrimental impact
16 to bighorn sheep. You know, it's about scale at that
17 point, but it is no doubt that large-scale development and
18 bighorn sheep are generally not compatible.

19 I mean, I've even seen springs up by where I am,
20 where if you put some sort of infrastructure, sheep just
21 avoid the area completely. So I just want to state that,
22 as well as hopefully this could minimize impacts to
23 viewsheds. I drive to Southern California often. I go to
24 the public lands and the preserve and surrounding, and I,
25 you know, with the example of Ivanpah nearby, I know this

1 is a different kind of project, but impacts to viewsheds,
2 you know, no one really wants to stare at a huge industrial
3 array like what you have outside of Las Vegas, if we can
4 sort of minimize that to the extent, you know, that's
5 practical.

6 But also, as a regional community member, I don't
7 know a lot of other people that moved out to the desert to
8 be surrounded by large industrial projects. So I am
9 concerned that this undermines kind of the way of life in
10 the area and the rural qualities of the area. I'm not
11 exactly sure what could practically be done about that, but
12 it's sort of an existential thing.

13 As well as if there's one project I've seen
14 nearby in Pahrump in that valley, it usually leads to a
15 number of other projects, and I'm definitely concerned
16 about there being a number of projects completely
17 surrounding Baker and other communities in the desert here,
18 and just the multiplication of that and the effects that
19 that could have on local communities, irrespective of some
20 of the benefits, whether in agreements or with short-term
21 jobs. I just do have a concern with the proliferation
22 potential of this, as well as just any impacts to access to
23 our public lands in this part of the desert.

24 You know, we've had the preserve designated. We
25 have Death Valley, we have some wonderful lands betwixt and

1 between, and they're all publicly accessible, and anything
2 that kind of gets in the way of that, I think, should bear
3 due scrutiny, as -- you know, even if it's nearby, but not
4 intruding on a recreation area, you know, it does affect
5 public access. So I do just want that to be considered in
6 this.

7 Yeah. That's the conclusion of my comments.

8 Thank you.

9 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: Thank you, Cameron.

10 MR. YOUNG: Thank you. Seeing no other raised
11 hands in the room, I'm going to transition to our Zoom
12 attendees.

13 Just a reminder, if you're joining us via Zoom
14 online or by phone, please let us know you would like to
15 make a comment by using the raise hand feature on Zoom. If
16 you're online, you're going to check the open palm at the
17 bottom of your screen, and if you're joining us by phone,
18 please press star 9.

19 Luke Basulto, we're going to unmute your line.
20 Please press star 6 to unmute on your end, state and spell
21 your name, any affiliation, and then begin your comment.

22 MR. L. BASULTO: Hello, can you hear me?

23 MR. YOUNG: I can hear you. You may begin.

24 MR. L. BASULTO: Hi, my name is Luke Basulto, and
25 I am a lifelong resident of Barstow, California, and I'll

1 be commenting as such today.

2 I just wanted to say that I strongly oppose the
3 Soda Mountain Solar Project. This proposal would put at
4 risk Mojave National Preserve, one of the largest and most
5 intact protected areas in the desert southwest. The
6 project site sits along an essential wildlife movement
7 corridor that connects the Soda Mountains to the preserve
8 and beyond. Bighorn sheep depend on this connection to
9 access water, forage, and mates. It's a vital connection
10 point for those animals there, and as a biologist, the
11 impacts of those animals are paramount to me. So building
12 an industrial-scale solar facility here would really just
13 sever one of the last intact linkages for those bighorn
14 sheep, and I strongly oppose that.

15 As a resident, I also worry about what this
16 project means for our desert communities. It is exactly
17 these type of controversial proposals with well-known
18 impacts that have been clear for over a decade that prevent
19 California from moving forward with renewable energy in the
20 right places. Protecting our climate future should not
21 come at the expense of Mojave National Preserve and our
22 animals or the people that call this desert home.

23 Thank you.

24 MR. YOUNG: Thank you. I want to offer one more
25 invitation for online government officials to raise their

1 hand.

2 At this time, EPPSC, we're going to unmute your
3 line. Please press star six to unmute on your end. State
4 and spell your name for the record, and you may begin.

5 EPPSC, you want to unmute on your end, and you
6 may begin.

7 MR. EPPS: Let's see. How about now? Can you
8 hear me now?

9 MR. YOUNG: We can hear you. Thank you.

10 MR. EPPS: Okay. Thank you. Sorry about that.

11 My name is Clinton Epps. That is spelled
12 C-L-I-N-T-O-N, and then E-P-P-S, as in Echo Papa Papa
13 Sierra. I'm a professor in the Department of Fisheries,
14 Wildlife, and Conservation Sciences at Oregon State
15 University. My comments are my own. I'm not speaking on
16 behalf of the university.

17 I have studied desert bighorn sheep in this
18 system since 1999, and this area is of keen interest to me,
19 and I do have a lot of concerns about the building of a
20 solar project in this location. Desert bighorn sheep
21 populations are very small, and there may be 5,000 in all
22 of the state of California. It's really the largest native
23 metapopulation of these animals in existence anywhere in
24 the United States. Each mountain range that they inhabit
25 holds a few dozen, maybe at most a few hundred.

1 And so, the primary thing that has allowed these
2 animals to persist, besides their amazing ability to live
3 in the desert, is the ability to move, to make occasional
4 movements between these mountain ranges. They may do it
5 seasonally to get mating access, better access to food or
6 water, and sometimes they do it permanently.

7 They establish new populations. The South Soda
8 Mountains was just recolonized by movements from the Cady
9 Mountains along a route that would be at least affected by
10 noise and proximity from this development, so that was just
11 recolonized by bighorn within the last 10 or 20 years, and
12 a wildlife overpass is finally planned off the north end of
13 this mountain range to mitigate the long-term barrier that
14 Interstate 15 has posed, but also with the construction
15 that is planned of a high-speed rail line that is going to
16 become a hard, complete, permanent barrier.

17 Bighorn have occasionally managed to at least try
18 to get across an interstate. They're not going to get
19 across that railway, so an overpass is planned. That would
20 establish key connectivity between all the populations
21 north of I-15 and all the populations south. We need that
22 to maintain genetic diversity, we need that to allow
23 recolonization of the North Soda Mountains, and we are very
24 concerned that construction of this facility before that
25 overpass is completed, before bighorn sheep have found it

1 and learned to be able to use it, would have a really
2 negative impact on them doing so.

3 Moreover, bighorn sheep do come down and use some
4 of the desert flats from time to time to get key forage
5 access in certain times of the year. So with my colleague,
6 Dr. Christina Aiello and I, we have prepared a report that
7 was circulated in the last year detailing a lot of this
8 based on decades of intensive research.

9 And so that is why we are concerned about this
10 plant, and I would say largely in opposition, or at least
11 not unless it's delayed and the footprint is managed very
12 carefully to avoid impacts to bighorn sheep.

13 Thank you.

14 MR. YOUNG: Thank you for your comment.

15 Kevin Emmerich, I'm opening your line. Please
16 unmute on your end, spell your name for the record, and
17 you're invited to share your affiliation and position on
18 the project if any, and begin your comment. You may begin.

19 Kevin, you're going to want to press star six on
20 your line or unmute.

21 Kevin, do you want to try unmuting on your line?

22 Okay. Kevin. We're going to come back to you.

23 Neal Desai, I'm opening your line. Please unmute
24 on your end, spell your name for the record, and you're
25 invited to share your affiliation and position on the

1 project if any, and then begin your comment. You may
2 begin.

3 It looks like Neal lowered his hand.

4 I'm going to move on to Laura Cunningham.

5 Laura, I'm opening your line. Please unmute on
6 your end, spell your name for the record. You're invited
7 to share your affiliation and position on the project, and
8 then begin your comment.

9 MR. CUNNINGHAM: Hello. Can you hear me?

10 MR. YOUNG: I can hear you. Please begin. Thank
11 you.

12 MR. CUNNINGHAM: My name is Laura Cunningham,
13 L-A-U-R-A C-U-N-N-I-N-G-H-A-M. I'm a biologist, and I'm
14 very concerned about the Mojave fringe-toed lizard
15 populations on the sand sheets around that area and in
16 Rasor. And we brought these comments up years ago during
17 the BLM EIS process, and I hope that the staff assessment
18 will review this. The Mojave French-toed lizards have been
19 hugely impacted already cumulatively in Riverside County
20 from massive solar developments on their habitat there. So
21 we're continuing to nibble away at this species, which
22 perhaps needs to be petitioned for federal listing because
23 of all these solar projects on sand habitats.

24 I also own a property near Sema (phonetic),
25 California, so I'm very concerned about groundwater

1 impacts. And lastly, this is right next to Mojave National
2 Preserve, one of our premier park units in California, and
3 it's just way too close. It'll impact the viewshed and
4 tourism, and so I fully oppose this project.

5 Thank you.

6 MR. YOUNG: Thank you for your comment.

7 I want to return to Kevin Emmerich.

8 Kevin, are you able to unmute your line? Just a
9 reminder to state and spell your name for the record. Your
10 comment should be three minutes or less. You may begin
11 whenever you're ready.

12 MR. EMMERICH: Hello. Can you hear me now?

13 MR. YOUNG: We absolutely can. Thank you.

14 MR. EMMERICH: Can you hear me?

15 Okay. Thank you.

16 My name is Kevin Emmerich, spelled
17 E-M-M-E-R-I-C-H. I represent an organization called Basin
18 and Range Watch, and I fully oppose the Soda Mountain Solar
19 Project.

20 As mentioned before, this one goes back a long
21 way. We opposed this beginning in 2010. It was another
22 applicant, but it was relatively the same project
23 footprint.

24 And we were not alone. There was a coalition of
25 environmental organizations opposing it. San Bernardino

1 County opposed Soda Mountain. That's why the CEC is now
2 handling this. The county didn't want it.

3 And very interestingly, the Los Angeles
4 Department of Water and Power refused to give this project
5 a power purchase agreement over the impacts it would have
6 to the Mojave Desert. So that's off to a pretty bad start
7 in the beginning.

8 It's pretty much proven and stated by other
9 commenters here that your mitigation towards bighorn sheep
10 will be inadequate. This will still impair connectivity.
11 Fringe-toed lizards were mentioned in sand transport.
12 Desert tortoise, you're going to have to issue take
13 permits. There are rare plants like the crucifixion thorn
14 located on this project site.

15 The bulldozing will create lots of fugitive dust.
16 I noticed the applicant did not even want to say how many
17 acre feet the five wells would use.

18 Would that hurt the tui chub in the Mojave River
19 by Zzyzx? We're not sure. Putting this next to the Mojave
20 National Preserve is really unnecessary.

21 Solar technology in the last 10 to 15 years has
22 gotten even more efficient. We should be using the built
23 environment for solar. We should be using rooftops over
24 canals, over parking lots. You know the drill, and you
25 know it does produce megawatts. The applicant will say,

1 no, that'll never work. Everybody knows that's not true.

2 Please, please reject this application. You can
3 do it.

4 It still needs federal permitting. That's going
5 to be another problem. There's all these really weird new
6 orders from the administration, and there's a good chance
7 that you guys won't even get this in the next three or four
8 years.

9 Even though you've got a record of decision,
10 there's still not a notice to proceed on the federal side,
11 and all that has to be reviewed.

12 Let's stop wasting time with the review of this
13 project and reject it. Thank you.

14 MR. YOUNG: Thank you for your comment.

15 I'm going to return to Neal Desai.

16 Neal, you're going to press star six to unmute
17 your line, or press the raise -- sorry, you're going to
18 press the unmute button on Zoom. Spell your name for the
19 record, and you're invited to share your affiliation and
20 position on the project, if any. You may begin at any
21 time.

22 MR. DESAI: Hi. Can you hear me?

23 MR. YOUNG: Hi, Neal. We can hear you.

24 MR. DESAI: Okay, great. This is Neal Desai,
25 N-E-A-L D-E-S-A-I, Senior Pacific Regional Director for the

1 National Parks Conservation Association, the nation's
2 leading voice for our national parks. We recently provided
3 public comment to the CEC in strong support of the Willow
4 Rock Energy Storage Center, so good to be back here with
5 you. I'm here to share our organizational opposition to
6 this project, which is now being pushed by VC Renewables,
7 its fourth owner.

8 We are committed to protecting our national park
9 system and iconic desert wildlife from this project. We
10 are committed to safeguarding tens of millions of dollars,
11 public dollars, that are allocated to a wildlife crossing
12 in this region, which will be rendered useless by this
13 project. We are committed to safeguarding our tourism
14 economy driven by countless Californians and the public
15 that visit the Mojave National Preserve.

16 This issue might be new to the Commission, but
17 it's not an issue of first impression for so many of us,
18 and it's extremely disappointing to see the project change
19 hands yet again to new owners who think this is a good
20 idea. We spent so much time dealing with the prior owners,
21 all of them, and this proposed development is in the same
22 area.

23 Ten years ago, it carried the brand as an example
24 of the worst type of solar project. We agree and will work
25 to make sure that that is known to this Commission.

1 We are also noted as in the application as a
2 proposed beneficiary of the Community Benefit Agreement.
3 We ask that our name be removed. We do not want national
4 park advocates anywhere or scientists who deeply oppose
5 this project to think that we are somehow taking money in
6 exchange for abdicating our duty and mission to protect the
7 park.

8 Commissioners, we are glad that you visited the
9 site, but visiting with just the applicant gives just one
10 perspective. As you are going to see through this process,
11 many others, including the country's leading bighorn sheep
12 scientists, have polar, polar-opposite views of this site
13 and the habitat value of this site. Every single prior
14 owner of this project has falsely claimed this project can
15 be properly mitigated for desert bighorn sheep, and we have
16 seen the same comments from the current owner of this
17 application in their materials submitted to the Commission.

18 So Commissioners, we request to visit the site
19 with you. We will be submitting a formal request to
20 coordinate towards that end.

21 And thank you very much. I hope you have a good
22 holiday weekend.

23 MR. YOUNG: Thank you, Neal.

24 Abraham Basulto, I'm going to open your line.
25 Please unmute on your end, spell your name for the record,

1 and you're also invited to share your affiliation and
2 position on the project, if any, and begin your comment.
3 We're asking for comments to be three minutes or less, and
4 you may begin when ready.

5 MR. A. BASULTO: Good afternoon. My name is
6 Abraham Basulto, A-B-R-A-H-A-M B-A-S-U-L-T-O Speaking on
7 behalf of Saving Slowpoke, a Barstow-based non-profit
8 working to protect the Mojave Desert tortoise and the
9 desert we call home.

10 We are strongly opposed to this project. It
11 would destroy critical desert habitat, fragment wildlife
12 corridors, and put additional pressure on species like the
13 desert tortoise that are already in decline. Once this
14 land is scrapped, it's gone forever. Our community is left
15 with the loss. The desert deserves solutions that protect
16 both people and wildlife. We urge you to reject this
17 project and instead prioritize alternatives that preserve
18 the desert's unique character and ensure a future we can be
19 proud of.

20 Thank you.

21 MR. YOUNG: Thank you.

22 It looks like we have no other public comments.

23 Back to you, Kaycee.

24 MS. CHANG: Thank you, Ryan, and thank you all
25 for taking the time today and sharing your comments.

1 As our Deputy Public Advisor Ryan Young
2 mentioned, you can submit comments anytime.

3 Can we get the next slide, please?

4 I think we don't need to take a break, so can we
5 get the next slide, please?

6 Thank you. This is good.

7 I wanted to remind everyone that we did file a
8 notice of preparation to the proposed project docket on
9 August 5th, 2025, and wanted to note that the comments on
10 the scope and content of the environmental document in
11 response to the notice of preparation are due by September
12 3rd, 2025. Comments can be submitted electronically via
13 the e-comment system on the CEC webpage for the proposed
14 Soda Mountain Solar Project or mailed directly to the CEC
15 at the address identified on this slide.

16 Next slide, please.

17 We hope it's apparent to you that the CEC
18 welcomes public participation. The comment period on the
19 notice of preparation again closes on September 3rd. We
20 will consider all comments received. We anticipate the
21 staff assessment will be published and circulated for
22 public review in December 2025.

23 And I will now pass it to Commissioner Gallardo
24 for closing comments.

25 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: All right. Thank you so

1 much, everyone. That went rather quickly. I appreciate
2 that we had people in the room. We also had about 60
3 participants on Zoom just so that those in the room are
4 aware. We had about 10 comments. I really appreciate the
5 folks who participated to share their insights, their
6 concerns, their questions.

7 And also I wanted to acknowledge the invitation
8 from Neal Desai. I don't know if I got the correct name of
9 the organization, National Parks Conservation Association,
10 but do appreciate that invite to visit the site again,
11 having your insight. So please do reach out to our staff.
12 The email is on the screen right now, and we'd be happy to
13 take you up on that offer.

14 So again, as I said at the top, we're very
15 grateful for everyone. This is wonderful to be here, and
16 we will be back for another meeting and possibly these
17 additional site visits. So thank you.

18 And let me just offer to our Chair and Executive
19 Director if they want an opportunity to make final remarks.

20 CHAIR HOCHSCHILD: Yeah. Just I had one question
21 for the gentleman in the back from the recreational vehicle
22 -- yeah. If you could come up. Thanks.

23 I was just curious, how big a community is that?
24 How many vehicles are used in the area you're describing?

25 MR. BANIS: I think the number that was stated by

1 the fire representative is accurate. Thousands will be
2 there on the OHV season.

3 OHV season is really limited to the cooler times
4 of the year, about October through at best Easter. In the
5 summertime, if everything shuts down, you could go out
6 there on a weekday and not see anyone on the entire 6,000
7 or 8,000 acre OHV area or 16,000 acre OHV area.

8 CHAIR HOCHSCHILD: And the season runs through --

9 MR. BASIN: October through about Easter, if
10 weather permits.

11 CHAIR HOCHSCHILD: Got it. Okay, that's helpful.
12 Thank you.

13 MR. BASIN: Absolutely.

14 CHAIR HOCHSCHILD: Now let me just thank all the
15 other stakeholders for joining and sharing your
16 perspectives.

17 And thanks to those of us on the team here who
18 came down to do the site visit today. That was really
19 helpful for me, Commissioner. So thanks for putting that
20 together.

21 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR BOHAN: I just also want to
22 thank everybody for showing up today, participating in the
23 public comment process, and thank staff for all their work,
24 in particular, Kevin, who did double work today with a
25 hearing we had in the other room and this one.

1 So thank you very much.

2 COMMISSIONER GALLARDO: All right. We are
3 adjourned.

4 Thank you.

5 (The meeting adjourned at 2:26 p.m.)

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CERTIFICATE OF REPORTER

I do hereby certify that the testimony in the foregoing hearing was taken at the time and place therein stated; that the testimony of said witnesses were reported by me, a certified electronic court reporter and a disinterested person, and was under my supervision thereafter transcribed into typewriting.

And I further certify that I am not of counsel or attorney for either or any of the parties to said hearing nor in any way interested in the outcome of the cause named in said caption.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 12th day of September, 2025.



ELISE HICKS, IAPRT CERT**2176

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I do hereby certify that the testimony in the foregoing hearing was taken at the time and place therein stated; that the testimony of said witnesses were transcribed by me, a certified transcriber and a disinterested person, and was under my supervision thereafter transcribed into typewriting.

And I further certify that I am not of counsel or attorney for either or any of the parties to said hearing nor in any way interested in the outcome of the cause named in said caption.

I certify that the foregoing is a correct transcript, to the best of my ability, from the electronic sound recording of the proceedings in the above-entitled matter.



MARTHA L. NELSON, CERT**367

September 12, 2025