

DOCKETED	
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*Comment Received From: Eastern Kern County Resource Conservation District
Submitted On: 2/12/2026
Docket Number: 24-OPT-03*

Opposition to the Opt-in EIR of the Soda Mountain Solar Project

Additional submitted attachment is included below.



**Eastern Kern County Resource
Conservation District**

300 S. Ridgecrest Rd.
Ridgecrest, CA 93555

February 9, 2026

California Energy Commission

715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Opposition to the Opt-in EIR of the Soda Mountain Solar Project near Baker, CA,
Docket Number 24-OPT-03**

Dear Chair Hochschild and Members of the California Energy Commission:

The Eastern Kern County Resource Conservation District (EKCRCD) respectfully submits this letter in opposition to the proposed opt-in procedure to the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Soda Mountain Solar Project near Baker, California.

EKCRCD supports the development of renewable energy in California; however, such development must be responsibly sited to avoid irreversible harm to sensitive ecosystems, protected wildlife, and public trust lands. The Soda Mountain Solar Project is a poorly located, large-scale industrial facility proposed for an ecologically critical and largely undisturbed area adjacent to the Mojave National Preserve.

This 300-megawatt project would occupy approximately 2,670 acres of Bureau of Land Management land and has existed in various forms for nearly 20 years. It was rejected by the San Bernardino County Board of Supervisors in 2016 due to unacceptable environmental impacts and limited local benefit. The use of a state opt-in process to override local land-use decisions disregards that prior determination and undermines meaningful local and regional review.

The project site lies within a vital wildlife corridor connecting the Soda and Cady Mountains to the Mojave National Preserve. These corridors are essential for desert bighorn sheep movement, genetic diversity, and long-term population viability. The project's own EIR concludes that construction and operation would result in significant and unavoidable impacts to desert bighorn sheep, a Fully Protected species under California Fish and Game Code Section 4700, and would conflict with laws prohibiting take of such species.

Of particular concern is the project's proximity to a planned wildlife crossing over Interstate 15, designed to restore bighorn sheep connectivity disrupted by the freeway. Industrial-scale solar development in this location threatens to compromise the effectiveness of this crossing, undermining years of planning, public investment, and conservation science.

The project would also contribute to cumulative impacts on other sensitive desert species, including Mojave fringe-toed lizards, desert tortoises, burrowing owls, and native vegetation, while posing risks to scarce desert water resources through groundwater extraction and altered surface hydrology. These impacts outweigh the project's benefits, particularly given the availability of less damaging alternatives.

California can and must meet its renewable energy goals by prioritizing solar development on rooftops, parking lots, canals, and already-disturbed lands. Advances in technology make these options increasingly feasible without sacrificing intact desert ecosystems or threatening national parks and preserves.

For these reasons, EKCRCD urges the California Energy Commission to reject the opt-in procedure to the EIR and deny further approval of the Soda Mountain Solar Project.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Judith A. Decker". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial "J" and "D".

Judith A. Decker
President, Board of Directors
Eastern Kern County Resource Conservation District