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Project Title:	Soda Mountain Solar
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*Comment Received From: Melanie Branson
Submitted On: 2/26/2026
Docket Number: 24-OPT-03*

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Additional submitted attachment is included below.



**Kerncrest Audubon
Society**
P.O. Box 984
Ridgecrest, California

February 9, 2026

California Energy Commission
715 P Street
Sacramento, CA 95814

**Re: Opposition to Opt-in Procedure to EIR in Support 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 Kerncrest Audubon Society submits this letter in formal opposition to the proposed opt-in procedure to the Environmental Impact Report (EIR) for the Soda Mountain Solar Project near Baker, California.

As an organization dedicated to the conservation of birds and their habitats, we are deeply concerned about the project's location adjacent to the Mojave National Preserve and the Zzyzx area, one of the most ecologically significant bird concentration sites in the eastern Mojave Desert. This region supports both resident desert birds and a remarkable diversity of migratory species that rely on scarce water, vegetation, and intact habitat during critical stages of their life cycles.

Zzyzx is widely recognized by ornithologists and birders as a "migrant trap," where exhausted birds concentrate during spring and fall migration due to the presence of water and mature vegetation in an otherwise arid landscape. Numerous bird species rare in California have been documented in this area, including Ovenbird, Cape May Warbler, Golden-winged Warbler, Wood Thrush, and Rufous-backed Robin. These occurrences underscore the site's exceptional importance as stopover habitat within regional and continental migratory networks.

In addition to migratory species, the area supports a diverse assemblage of desert and regional resident birds, including Lucy's Warbler, Brewer's Sparrow, Black-tailed Gnatcatcher, Rock Wren, Horned Lark, Greater Roadrunner, and Phainopepla. These species depend on intact desert landscapes with minimal industrial disturbance for breeding, foraging, and shelter.

The proposed 2,670-acre industrial solar facility would introduce extensive habitat loss, vegetation removal, fencing, lighting, noise, and increased human activity into this sensitive landscape. Such disturbance threatens to degrade the ecological conditions that make this area viable for both migratory and resident bird populations. Large-scale solar development is also associated with increased collision risk, habitat fragmentation, and disruption of avian movement patterns, particularly in areas that function as ecological refugia.

We are also concerned about cumulative impacts. The Mojave Desert has already experienced extensive habitat conversion from energy, transportation, and infrastructure projects. Incremental loss of intact desert habitat disproportionately affects birds, which rely on a limited number of reliable stopover sites. Once these sites are degraded or lost, they cannot be easily replaced.

Kerncrest Audubon Society supports renewable energy development that is responsibly sited on rooftops, parking structures, canals, and previously disturbed lands. Advances in solar technology make it unnecessary to sacrifice intact desert ecosystems and critical wildlife habitats to meet California's clean energy goals.

For these reasons, we respectfully urge 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 the opportunity to provide these comments.

Sincerely,

Robert E. Parker
President, Kerncrest Audubon Society