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Sunday, August 29, 2010

Commissioner Jeffery D Byron
Commissioner James D Boyd
California Energy Commission
1516 Ninth Street, MS-4
Sacramento, CA 95814

By letter, and by email to doCKET@energy.state.ca.us

Dear Commissioners Byron and Boyd,

Re: Ivanpah, Docket No. 07-AFC-5

You have issued a PMPD recommending the Ivanpah project be approved.

The comments in this letter illustrate why Ivanpah should not be approved.

I fully understand the intense political incentive to approve, and the frustration of abandoning the substantial analytical efforts by the parties involved. These are not reasons to override the substantial environmental damage that has been identified by the CEC process.

There is no question that carbon based energy must be reduced substantially, since the resultant human-caused global warming phenomenon cannot be denied or allowed to continue. California seems to be acting in panic mode, almost as if it alone holds the solution, with the obligation of immediate action. Of course, such is not the case. California need not act in such haste that it is seduced into abandoning its environmental responsibilities. We must resist this pressure, and must act with more deliberation and care, and must spend more effort devising less environmentally damaging solutions. Ivanpah is low-hanging fruit, temptingly easy to grab. It is also environmental disastrous. We can be more clever. Those who follow deserve more from us.

The applicant, understandably, has argued that ISEGS is an appropriate solution. Their motivation is solely monetary. CEC staff has not been so crass, but in the end argues for approval. Much of the documentation generated by staff describes the huge environmental impacts. At the same time, the documentation includes inadequate justification to support what appears too often to be a foregone conclusion.

I strenuously object to the secrecy of project economics. Only from reading news reports do we know the approximate total cost of construction. We are not allowed to know anything else of the project's economics, including any indication of the projected electricity rates to the power companies or to retail customers. This secrecy exists despite use of public money and public land. This is government opacity, not transparency. This objection would be out of place if no government resources were to be used. The project is using my money, in secret.

Following are reasons, in no particular order, explaining why the project is ill-advised.

- The site is inappropriate. Overwhelmed by solar energy proposals (and bureaucracies are never quick anyway), the BLM has not had time to identify appropriate sites. Absent BLM guidance, the applicant picked the site. The applicant has no primary interest in environmental concerns.
- The site is inappropriate: Ivanpah Valley is essentially untouched 'since the beginning of time'. To replace this with an industrial site in this panic atmosphere is

inappropriate. The parallel is clear cutting old-growth forest, which we have largely determined to be inappropriate for many reasons. Now we are proposing to clear-cut old-growth Mojave, except that it will be destroyed for 40-50 years, and may never recover after that. It looks like we are unable to transfer the forest lesson to our deserts.

- The site is inappropriate. This is public land. My public land. Especially when there are better choices, I do not want it given over to industrial.
- The CEC can behave with near dictatorial powers. It can violate CEQA with an override, with no fear of legal appeal except to the California Supreme Court, which takes cases at its discretion. The public has essentially no recourse. This is a violation of basic American rights. The CEC must use this power given to it with extreme caution, or better, not at all.
- Tortoises: Experience is that moving them causes huge mortality, from predation, disease and other causes. The pro- and con- biologists and lawyers can forever argue this, quote studies, boundaries, rules and regs, and discuss 'relocation' vs. 'translocation'. But in the end the project will kill a huge percentage tortoises now on the site. Should we do this to this animal under stress from so many other sources? Certainly not.
- A 'Solar and Ecological Interpretive Center' is a poor substitute. Ivanpah 'as-is' is an ecological interpretive center, and solar facilities, built on appropriate sites, can be their own Solar Interpretive Center.
- Project economics is mentioned in numerous places in the Staff Assessment, yet economics is has not been analyzed. Economics are as necessary to environmental impact as biology, since the foundation of the project is economic, and the foundation must be solid to avoid failures.
- The documentation often uses cost considerations to justify the design of Ivanpah, but never with backup data or evidence. Statements about cost look suspiciously like false justification.
- Alternate sites, on public and private land are universally rejected as inferior to Ivanpah for various reasons. Considering BrightSource selected Ivanpah well before it had detailed analysis of any site impacts, we are to believe the selection was almost clairvoyant, since the site turned out superior, according to the documentation.
- Nor does the documentation describe an effort to find a minimum impact site. The alternatives described were not analyzed in the detail of the ISEGS site. These considerations invite suspicion that the alternatives considered in the documentation were selected, and the descriptions crafted, just so they could be rejected.
- The visual impact – the three 45-story towers and the huge field of mirrors, is completely out of character with the desert environment.
- Potential alternate sites listed as alternates by other projects are rejected. No coordination, or attempt at coordination, among projects has been revealed. This is another way of conveniently steering approval to ISEGS.
- Similarly, alternative technologies are rejected for various reasons:
 - Fresnel is rejected since it is proprietary, and so not available, without evidence that Ausra refused licensing the technology.
 - PV is rejected as visually prominent, but of course ISEG's towers and reflective mirrors are vastly more visually prominent.
 - Particularly revealing is the statement that parabolic trough would not significantly reduce impacts, despite a 25-30% smaller footprint. A truthful statement would be that parabolic would indeed reduce impacts because of the smaller footprint. These kinds of statements again arouse suspicion that analysis of the project was a paper exercise with a foregone conclusion.

- Conservation was rejected because ‘it alone is not sufficient to address all of California’s energy needs’, as if a technology that does not ‘address all of California’s needs’ must be rejected. Under this interpretation, ISEGS should be rejected.
- Those of us who are aware of the energy situation are doing our best to conserve. I live a mile and a half up the street from Governor Schwarzenegger. He has more power, and has done more, to promote destruction of desert sites than anyone else in California. To show his lack of personal commitment to the energy situation, I took the following picture at 10 PM this evening. It’s the entrance to the subdivision where he lives. The vanity lights are on, as they are whenever I drive past after dark. Even the vanity water fall is flowing. Apparently the Governor has no personal commitment. While the wattage involved is insignificant, the symbolism is as significant as any of the impacts that will be ignored. Governor Schwarzenegger is asking others to bear the full load, taking not the smallest burden himself.



Night-time vanity lighting at the entrance gate to Governor Schwarzenegger’s subdivision.

All this points to a political solution, disregarding California’s traditional respect for the environment. We must not be so disrespectful of our legacy.

The California desert is precious. Perhaps this is not well understood. Today, we are largely a community of city-dwellers more disconnected with our environment than in the past. The character of the desert was most eloquently described in Randall Henderson’s 1937 editorial that appeared in the first issue of *The Desert*, the magazine he started then. Here are the appropriate three paragraphs.

There Are Two Deserts

One is a grim desolate wasteland. It is the home of venomous reptiles and stinging insects, of vicious thorn-covered plants and trees, and of unbearable heat. This is the desert seen by the stranger speeding along the highway, impatient to be out of ‘this damnable country.’ It is the desert visualized by those children of luxury to whom any environment is unbearable which does not provide all the comforts and services of a pampering civilization. It is a concept fostered by fiction writers who dramatize the tragedies of the desert for the profit it will bring them.

But the stranger and the uninitiated see only the mask. The other Desert – the real Desert – is not for the eyes of the superficial observer, or the fearful soul of the cynic. It is a land, the character of which is hidden except to those who come with friendliness and understanding. To

these the Desert offers rare gifts: health-giving sunshine – a sky that is studded with diamonds – a breeze that bears no poison – a landscape of pastel colors such as no artist can duplicate – thorn-covered plants which during countless ages have clung tenaciously to life through heat and drought and wind and the depredations of thirsty animals, and yet each season set forth blossoms of exquisite coloring as a symbol of courage that has triumphed over terrifying obstacles.

To those who come to the Desert with friendliness, it gives friendship; to those who come with courage, it gives new strength of character. Those seeking relaxation find release from the world of man-made troubles. For those seeking beauty, the Desert offers nature's rarest artistry. This is the desert that men and women learn to love.

Sincerely,

Original Signature in Dockets

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