

DOCKET

09-AFC-9

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STATE OF CALIFORNIA

**Energy Resources Conservation
and Development Commission**

In the Matter of:

THE APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION
FOR THE (SOLAR MILLENNIUM)
RIDGECREST SOLAR POWER PROJECT

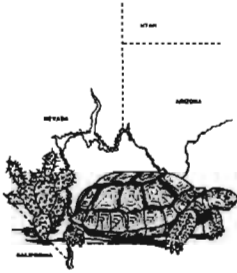
DOCKET NUMBER 09-AFC-9

**INTERVENOR DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL COMMENTS
“RIDGECREST SOLAR POWER PROJECT MOHAVE GROUND SQUIRREL
HABITAT CONNECTIVITY STUDY, *DRAFT STUDY PLAN*, OCTOBER 19, 2010”**

November 9, 2010

Desert Tortoise Council
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RECEIVED THE STATE OF CALIFORNIA ENERGY RESOURCES CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
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DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL
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November 9, 2010

Via Email and U.S. Mail

Mr. Eric Solorio
Siting Project Manager
California Energy Commission
1516 Ninth Street, MS-15
Sacramento, California 95814

Re: "Ridgecrest Solar Power Project Mohave Ground Squirrel Habitat Connectivity Study, *Draft Study Plan*, October 19, 2010"

Dear Mr. Solorio:

We offer the following comments on the "Ridgecrest Solar Power Project Mohave Ground Squirrel Habitat Connectivity Study, *Draft Study Plan*, October 19, 2010" based on our professional knowledge and in the interest of ensuring that the proposed study will adhere to the best scientific standards.

The Desert Tortoise Council is pleased to read that our request of October 3, 2010 to have incidental data on desert tortoises recorded during the Mohave Ground Squirrel (MGS) connectivity study has been added to the *Draft Study Plan*. The proposal to use a data sheet to record basic data on each tortoise observed, and to enter that data in a special database, is an important addition to the Plan. As you know, the proposed site for the Ridgecrest Solar Power Project is important habitat for both MGS and desert tortoises.

We are reassured that the *Draft Study Plan* includes more detail on the sites to be sampled, the sampling procedure, and the statistical programs to be used to estimate the importance of the project site for MGS connectivity, based both on empirical study-site data and hypothetical modeling. We suggest that this level of detail be continued in distinguishing between Scenario I and Scenario 2 as the terms "no or very few" and "greater than a few" MGS captures (page 6) are nebulous. It would be more precise to attach numbers to these terms. All the more so because the MGS is a low-density species and, as the *Draft Study Plan* states, "there is a great amount of annual variation in the reproductive success of MGS" (p. 6). The distinction between the two Scenarios should not be arbitrary, nor should it be decided in the field.

In addition, we recommend that the number of traps to be placed in each trapping grid be increased from twenty to sixty in order to effectively capture any MGS in the grid for each study site. The California Department of Fish and Game "Mohave Ground Squirrel Survey Guidelines" (2003), in specifying the conditions for a project survey of potential MGS habitat, require 100 Sherman live-traps for each 80 acres of a non-linear project, or 1.25 traps per acre. With the effective trapping grid of 19.5 hectares (48.18 acres) specified in the *Draft Study Plan* (page 3), the RSPP Connectivity Study should utilize sixty (48.18 x 1.25) rather than twenty traps per grid.

According to our calculations, the *Draft Study Plan* proposes 240 trapping days in each 45 day trapping period with the consequence that trapping will occur simultaneously in at least five sites during each period. If each trapping site requires a minimum of two field workers, there will be at least ten workers spread out in the field at the same time. Two questions arise from these calculations. Are there enough qualified field workers to accomplish the work as planned and can Dr. Leitner effectively supervise ten or more workers spread out in the field at one time?

We continue to believe that a budget should be prepared for the study. Academic research protocols that require external funding are necessarily accompanied by a breakdown of anticipated costs so that others may judge the adequacy of funding and whether the goals of the study are likely to be achieved. Including a budget, at least for the first year, would reflect standard, professional practice.

The Desert Tortoise Council understands Solar Millennium's desire for the agencies to approve a study whereby they can abide by the results. Yet we caution the agencies to bear in mind that the quality of the results will depend as much on how the study is actually conducted as on how well the study was designed. It is only good science to suspend judgment on any research until the results are reported and evaluated.

Sincerely,

Glenn R. Stewart

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APPLICATION FOR CERTIFICATION
For the *RIDGECREST SOLAR*
POWER PROJECT

Docket No. 09-AFC-9
PROOF OF SERVICE
(Revised 7/9/2010)

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DECLARATION OF SERVICE

I, Sidney Sellman declare that on, Nov 9, 2010, I served and filed copies of the attached DTE Comments MGS Draft Study Plan. The original document, filed with the Docket Unit, is accompanied by a copy of the most recent Proof of Service list, located on the web page for this project at: [http://www.energy.ca.gov/sitingcases/solar_millennium_ridgecrest].

The document has been sent to both the other parties in this proceeding (as shown on the Proof of Service list) and to the Commission's Docket Unit, in the following manner:

(Check all that Apply)

For service to all other parties:

sent electronically to all email addresses on the Proof of Service list;

by personal delivery;

by delivering on this date, for mailing with the United States Postal Service with first-class postage thereon fully prepaid, to the name and address of the person served, for mailing that same day in the ordinary course of business; that the envelope was sealed and placed for collection and mailing on that date to those addresses **NOT** marked "email preferred."

AND

For filing with the Energy Commission:

sending an original paper copy and one electronic copy, mailed and emailed respectively, to the address below (preferred method);

OR

depositing in the mail an original and 12 paper copies, as follows:

CALIFORNIA ENERGY COMMISSION

Attn: Docket No. 09-AFC-9

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I declare under penalty of perjury that the foregoing is true and correct, that I am employed in the county where this mailing occurred, and that I am over the age of 18 years and not a party to the proceeding.

