

**BIG PINE PAIUTE TRIBE OF THE OWENS VALLEY***Big Pine Paiute Indian Reservation*

July 23, 2012

Mike Monasmith,
Senior Project Manager
California Energy Commission
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512
email: mike.monasmith@energy.ca.gov

RE: Comments on the Preliminary Staff Assessment and Supplemental Staff Assessment of the BrightSource Hidden Hills Solar Energy Generating System

Dear Mr. Monasmith:

The following comments address the Preliminary Staff Assessment and Supplemental Staff Assessment of the BrightSource Hidden Hills Solar Energy Generating System.

The Big Pine Paiute Tribe of the Owens Valley (Tribe) recommends the “No Project” Alternative for the project. This area of southeastern Inyo County is not appropriate for industrial-scale solar development which would produce significant impacts on cultural, historical, biological, and visual resources which can’t be mitigated to a less than significant level. The 500 megawatt power plant would have approximately 85,000 elevated mirrors which would be used to focus the sun's rays on a solar receiver steam generator that would produce steam to generate electricity. There would be two solar receiver steam generators on 740 ft. towers.

Cultural Resources—Cultural Landscapes Adversely Effected

The Supplemental Staff Assessment provides an excellent description of three cultural landscapes which would be adversely effected by the project: Salt Song Landscape, Pahrump Paiute Home Landscape, and the Mo hav Landscape. The Tribe supports the Pahrump Paiute Tribe’s opposition to the project and the staff report’s assessment of the project’s significant impacts to cultural resources which can’t be mitigated:

“The construction of the proposed project would cause a substantial adverse change in the significance of the three ethnographic landscapes. The presence of the heliostat fields and the 750 foot tall solar power towers would be a stark visual intrusion that would profoundly and irreparably degrade the ability of the landscapes to convey historical significance under CRHR

Criterion 1. In particular, the mass of the looming towers, in combination with the operational glare from the solar receiver steam generators atop each one, would compromise the setting, feeling, and association aspects of the resource integrity, aspects critical to the resource's ability to convey its associative values under Criterion 1. Subsequent to the construction of the facility, one would no longer be able to experience the sense of the landscape as it was during its period of significance" (p. 56).

Historic Resources—Old Spanish Trail/Mormon Road Adversely Effected

The Supplemental Staff Assessment states: "At least one historical built-environment resource, the Old Spanish Trail-Mormon Road, has been identified in the HHSEGS PAA thus far. Substantial information, including the National Register of Historic Places nomination of the Nevada segments of the Old Spanish Trail, has led staff to conclude that, within the PAA, this resource is not represented by a single route, but as a corridor of converging and intermingled tracks and trails. The project site is located within this corridor, with traces running throughout the project site. Staff has concluded that that the impacts of the proposed HHSGS project to this Old Spanish Trail-Mormon Road Northern Corridor (Corridor) would be significant and, even with full implementation of CUL-9 and CUL-12, would not be mitigated to a less than significant level" (p. 2).

In addition, the two 750 foot tall towers will have significant adverse visual impacts on the Old Spanish Trail, a National Historic Trail. Bill Helmer, the Tribal Historic Preservation Officer for the Big Pine Paiute Tribe, studied this area in 1998 as part of the National Park Service team which conducted the preliminary research for the Old Spanish Trail Feasibility Study. He also hiked a 350 mile segment of the Old Spanish Trail in 1983, with a 22 mile walk from Resting Springs on the west, past the project site to Stump Spring. Industrial-scale developments definitely would encroach upon the historic qualities of this landscape and would compromise the integrity of the Old Spanish Trail in this area.

Preliminary Staff Assessment (PSA), Biological Resources

The project will use approximately 140 acre feet of water a year. The Pahrump Valley groundwater basin has been in a state of overdraft for decades. The additional amount of water depletion for this project could have severe impacts on fragile desert vegetation such as the nearby mesquite bosques and other sensitive plant associations. Some last surviving cottonwoods and willows at Stump Spring not mentioned in the report may also be severely threatened with even minimal impacts to groundwater depletion.

The PSA recommends a monitoring plan in case the project produces adverse impacts to vegetation. This monitoring plan is inadequate because it seems that impacts to vegetation due to the project would be discovered after the damage had already been done. The project's impact on water resources and water-sensitive species and habitat would be significant, and could not be mitigated to a non-significant level.

Distributed Generation Alternative Needed

It is well known that Distributed Generation is a viable alternative to the industrial-scale projects which require huge adverse impacts to cultural, historical, biological, and visual resources (Bill Powers and Sheila Bowers, *Distributed Solar PV – Why It Should Be The Centerpiece Of U.S. Solar Energy Policy* (http://solardoneright.org/index.php/briefings/post/distributed_solar_pv_why_it_should_be_the_centerpiece_of_u.s._solar_energy_/)). However, this alternative is not included in the PSA. It is recommended that a Distributed Generation Alternative be included in the Alternatives section.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Virgil Moose".

Virgil Moose
Tribal Chairperson