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California Energy Commission
Dockets Office, MS-4
Re: Docket No. 19-ERDD-01
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

Delivered via email to: docket@energy.ca.gov

RE: Docket No. 19-ERDD-01
Comments on: Preliminary Draft Utility Scale Renewable Energy Generation Research Roadmap

Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders) respectfully submits these comments on the June 2019 Preliminary Draft Utility Scale Renewable Energy Generation Research Roadmap (draft Roadmap) to the California Energy Commission (CEC).

Defenders, on behalf of our 279,000 members and supporters in California, works towards protection of wildlife, ecosystems, and landscapes while supporting the timely development of renewable energy resources in California. Achieving a low carbon energy future is critical for California – for our economy, our communities, and the environment. Achieving this future—and *how* we achieve it—is critical for protecting California’s internationally treasured wildlife, landscapes, productive farmlands, and diverse habitats.

Planning for California’s Renewable Energy Future

Identifying the what, how, and where for utility scale renewable energy development in California has been an area of intense focus for the past decade by federal, state, and local government as well as a diverse group on stakeholders including environmental groups such as Defenders of Wildlife, The Nature Conservancy, Sierra Club, Natural Resource Defense Council, Center for Biological Diversity, California Audubon, and the California Native Plant Society. This has resulted in planning efforts to identify “least-conflict” areas for utility scale renewable energy development and

transmission including the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP)¹ and the San Joaquin Least Conflict Study.²

The DRECP is a collaborative effort between the CEC, California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM), and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) which resulted in a Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) approved by the BLM in 2016.

The BLM's approved plan identifies 388,000 acres of Development Focus Areas (DFAs) designed to streamline renewable energy development. The DFAs were identified because of their energy generation potential and relatively low resource conflicts. The plan has been structured to help steer renewable energy development to these areas by providing a streamlined permitting path and predictable mitigation requirements. The DRECP does not restrict renewable energy development. In addition to the DFAs, there are more than 400,000 acres of land outside of the DFAs that could also be considered for renewable energy development, however, these lands have not been pre-screened and, therefore, do not provide the same opportunities to streamline development.³

The San Joaquin least conflict study was a multi-stakeholder process which identified over 470,000 acres identify least conflict lands suitable for utility scale solar PV development in the San Joaquin Valley.

To further facilitate siting and development of renewable energy including utility scale projects the CEC has invested significant effort in developing the tools and resources found in the California Energy Gateway.⁴ In particular, the California Energy Infrastructure Planning Analyst⁵ was created by the Conservation Biology Institute for the California Energy Commission to assist with planning energy development throughout the state to improve planning efficiency and to avoid environmental risks based on the best available spatial datasets.

The draft Roadmap lists “resource availability” as a key barrier or challenge to utility scale renewable energy development in Section 1.4 and is defined as:

*RESOURCE AVAILABILITY: Is there a clear understanding of geographical locations appropriate for deployment? What regulatory or permitting barriers that may inhibit the development of utility scale systems? Are forecasting improvements necessary to enhance operations and certainty in power scheduling?*⁶

¹ <https://www.drecp.org/>

² <https://www.law.berkeley.edu/research/ceec/research/climate/solar-pv-in-the-sjv/>

³ https://www.drecp.org/faqs/DRECP_FAQs.pdf

⁴ <https://caenergy.databasin.org/>

⁵ <http://ceipa.databasin.org/>

⁶ Preliminary Draft Utility-Scale Renewable Energy Generation Research Roadmap pg. 10

Resource availability is considered in the sections for each technology in the draft Roadmap. For example, in Section 2.1 of the draft Roadmap states:

***Resource Availability** – Many locations in California are ideal for PV solar energy development (and concentrated solar power (CSP) development) but are being limited due to local and national ordinances (The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan [DRECP] for example). Counties have outright banned solar energy developments in their state, while national land use plans have limited the amount of land that can be used for renewable energy development in the southwest. Steps must be taken to work with both local and national entities to identify and develop land ideal for solar generation and ensure that these lands can be developed.⁷*

The above statement is rife with incorrect generalities and includes assertions that appear to discount the decade of concerted landscape planning policy effort by the CEC, local government, and the federal government to identify appropriate lands for renewable energy development and transmission to meet California’s energy needs. Indeed, this statement insinuates that the DRECP provides too little land for solar development when, in fact, this land use plan was developed with CEC leadership and provides nearly 400,000 acres of public land for development. In addition, the DRECP part of a federal land management plan and is not a “national ordinance.” Furthermore, no County in California has “outright banned solar energy development”⁸ and in fact the California Solar Act provides clear limitations of the ability of local government to restrict rooftop and distributed generation solar.⁹

While much of the Roadmap does not present particularly new information or analysis, we find the consideration of “resource availability” and the categorization of land use and conservation planning activities as a barrier utility scale renewable energy development to be both inaccurate and counter to longstanding state policies and efforts by state and local agencies to plan for renewable energy.

We request that each of the “Resource Availability” assessments be revisited and revised to reflect the substantive planning efforts that have undertaken for utility scale renewable energy. We recommend the following language:

Resource Availability – There are hundreds of thousands of acres of land in California that have been identified through public planning processes as suitable for PV solar development based on solar resources, protection of natural resources, land use compatibility, and proximity to load or transmission. Additional land use planning efforts would further support identification of additional least conflict development areas to facilitate development while avoiding the problems of past conflicts over poor siting decisions by developers. Funding should be provided to support these efforts including on-going funding for the CEC’s California Energy Infrastructure Planning Analyst.

⁷ Preliminary Draft Utility-Scale Renewable Energy Generation Research Roadmap pg. 13

⁸ Please contact Scott Morgan at the California Governor’s Office of Planning and Research

⁹ https://leginfo.legislature.ca.gov/faces/codes_displaySection.xhtml?sectionNum=65850.5.&lawCode=GOV

Technical Advisory Committee Composition

We note the Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) acknowledged in the draft Roadmap is a relatively small group and does not include key subject matter experts and thought leaders working on renewable energy in California. Nor does it include representatives from key energy participants such as representative from the large utility companies, Community Choice Aggregators, active renewable energy developers, or environmental organizations active in energy planning and policy as outlined in Task 1.10 in the scope of work for this project.¹⁰ Inclusion of individuals currently active and knowledgeable in renewable energy development in California would provide much needed accuracy and perspective to the Roadmap. We recommend expanding the TAC to include representatives from the above areas to provide additional knowledge, input, and expertise.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to review the Preliminary Draft Utility Scale Renewable Energy Generation Research Roadmap. We look forward to reviewing a revised and updated draft. Please contact Kate Kelly at (530) 902-1615 or kate@kgconsulting.net with any questions.

Sincerely,



Kim Delfino
California Program Director



Kate Kelly
Consultant

¹⁰ https://ww2.energy.ca.gov/business_meetings/2018_packets/2018-05-09/Item_21_300-17-005.pdf