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Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Comment

Comments for January Lithium Valley Blue Ribbon Panel Meeting from Thomas Tortez, Jr., Tribal Council Chairman, Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla.

January 27, 2022

Chairwoman and Commission Members, I appreciate the opportunity to comment today. My name is Thomas Tortez, Jr. and I am the Chairman of the Torres Martinez Desert Cahuilla Indians, a Federally recognized tribe and sovereign nation. Our 24,000-acre Reservation is located in the heart of the area now called "Lithium Valley" and our ancestors have lived here since time immemorial.

The Tribe recognizes that there is considerable interest by the members of this Commission, the State of California, and other stakeholders in exploring opportunities to recover lithium from the Salton Sea's geothermal area. The Torres Martinez reservation includes land submerged under the Salton Sea and areas to the northwest of the Known Geothermal Resource Area.

We have appreciated the opportunity to provide a Torres Martinez representative, Tribal Council Member Art Lopez Jr., on the appointed 14-member Blue Ribbon Commission. The presentations and information shared at the monthly meetings have been very informative and the Torres Martinez tribe is interested in exploring opportunities for collaborative efforts in Lithium Valley. Specifically, we would like to join other stakeholders at the table for discussions on respectful ways to viably extract and refine this important resource and ways to develop an inclusive local workforce to support the lithium market coming to the region.

Our socioeconomic development vision for the Tribe includes supporting the adoption of renewable technologies and infrastructure where appropriate and compatible with our cultural landscape and development plans. We welcome early discussions on these topics before final siting and decisions have been made.

The Tribe has also interested proposals from potential development partners interested in working with the Tribe to site and develop renewable power and related projects on or near the Reservation and we are also interested in working on energy related activities with the Imperial Irrigation District.

Based on information shared in recent Blue-Ribbon Commission meetings, we do have a couple of concerns to raise, however. First, we understand that the wheels are moving in the State of California to streamline approvals for the development of new geothermal plants and lithium extraction methods at the Salton Sea. We understand that the California Energy Commission is proposing rule making to move CEC authority for approving new power plants to local counties. (CEC Docket 21-OIR-02). We want to ensure that all AB-52 requirements for tribal consultation will still be met if this important CEQA lead agency role is delegated from the CEC to Imperial County. We would welcome the opportunity to meet with the County and the California Geologic Energy

Management Divisions (Cal GEM) on any new regional lithium extraction and/or geothermal plant siting proposals early in the permitting process.

The second area of concern is making sure the Tribe is doing all we can to encourage the Commission to adopt truly inclusive workforce development opportunities for Lithium Valley. Our tribal members already live within the Lithium Valley but have been historically overlooked for local skilled job needs and our Tribe has been overlooked for business development partnership opportunities that could bring socioeconomic benefits to our tribal community. Many of our members are interested in developing the skills that are anticipated to be needed for the Lithium Valley workforce including hospitality, electrician, skilled labor, management and other roles. The Tribe respectfully requests to be included in initiatives to bring Lithium Valley workforce training opportunities and job fairs to the Reservation and that descriptions of jobs expected to be needed and their requirements are shared with our Tribal Employee Rights Ordinance Office (TERO) well before hiring commences. If there are scholarships or other mechanisms available to support our members in obtaining the needed certifications to support the Lithium Valley jobs that are coming in the future, please let us know and we can help put you in touch with interested and qualified members from our community.

Finally, while we are appreciative of the invitation to be here to discuss Lithium Valley related opportunities, our Tribe and other low-income communities within Lithium Valley are at a significant disadvantage without technical resources to help us specifically understand the potential viability, risks, impacts, and costs and benefits of lithium related project development in the region. We would ask the Commission to please help provide qualified technical and engineering resources to assist us in evaluating the potential lithium resource from our submerged Salton Sea lands and opportunities to partner on geothermal energy development, lithium refinement, or support services for the future lithium marketplace coming to Imperial County. Without providing technical assistance and targeted outreach the Commission is unlikely to be able to meet its important inclusion goals and full participation from under resourced areas including Torres Martinez is unlikely to occur.

Thank you for your time and consideration. We look forward continuing to participate to the Commission's important work this year and contributing our perspectives to the Lithium Valley report due to the State Legislature on October 1, 2022.

Additional submitted attachment is included below.

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from Thomas Tortez, Jr., Tribal Council Chairman, Torres Martinez
Desert Cahuilla.**

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