

DOCKETED

Docket Number:	09-AFC-07C
Project Title:	Palen Solar Power Project - Compliance
TN #:	200104
Document Title:	Email from FWS opting to defer comments to FSA until docketed data fully integrated and thorough analysis can be made.
Description:	N/A
Filer:	Ann Crisp
Organization:	Palm Springs Fish and Wildlife Office
Submitter Role:	Public Agency
Submission Date:	8/1/2013 11:33:36 AM
Docketed Date:	8/1/2013

Crisp, Ann@Energy

From: Fraser, Jody [jody_fraser@fws.gov]
Sent: Wednesday, July 31, 2013 6:45 PM
To: Crisp, Ann@Energy; Stora, Christine@Energy; Martin-Gallardo, Jennifer@Energy; Ali, Anwar@Energy; Chris Huntley; Watson, Carol@Energy; Bill Haas
Cc: Joel Pagel (joel_pagel@fws.gov); Pete Sorensen (pete_sorensen@fws.gov); tera_baird@fws.gov; Tom Dietsch (thomas_dietsch@fws.gov); Ken Corey
Subject: Re: Palen PSA

Follow Up Flag: Follow up
Flag Status: Flagged

Dear Ann et al.,

Because of the compressed time line associated with the CEC amendment process for this project, the Palen PSA was published absent several data responses from PSH and the analysis contained therein is incomplete relative to many of the biological resources. Because of this, the FWS is opting to defer our review and comments to the FSA, after the outstanding and newly docketed data can be fully integrated and a more thorough analysis will be available. We were able to conduct a cursory review of the document, however, and offer the following for CEC's consideration:

1. We appreciate the synthesis of the energy flux information that has been gathered to date for the Rio Mesa and Hidden Hills projects; however, the assumptions regarding particular impacts, conclusions, and supporting rationale have yet to be quantified and a high level of uncertainty continues to confound the analyses associated with this type of technology.
2. As such, we remain concerned that power tower technology presents potential for harm to migratory birds and golden eagles, and we agree with the findings of the PSA documenting these risks. Also, recent documented avian mortalities at solar projects near the proposed Palen site (including both PV and trough) suggest that risks to migratory birds from utility-scale solar facilities are greater than anticipated. In particular, these facilities may mimic large bodies of water and attract bird species that otherwise have not been observed at these locations. We are concerned that the heliostats proposed for the Palen project present a similar risk that may be further exacerbated by the presence of the concentrated solar flux field. In other words, the heliostat field may attract birds to the vicinity of the concentrated solar flux field and increase the potential for injury and mortality.
3. As previously discussed among the REAT agencies and the Applicant, we recommend completion of a Bird and Bat Conservation Strategy and an Eagle Conservation Plan as the appropriate documents to assess these risks, identify measure to reduce impacts, establish robust mortality monitoring, and to present an adaptive management framework that can respond to mortality issues should they occur. We recommend that CEC adopt this terminology to minimize confusion and to improve consistency across agencies. The Service's BBCS and ECP guidelines have been provided to the Applicant to assist in the production of these documents. We acknowledge that these guidelines were written for wind energy projects and not all sections will apply directly to the proposed project. However, we will work with PSH to adapt those sections of the guidelines that are not directly applicable.
4. With the introduction of utility-scale renewable energy projects in this region and the lack of existing data on the impacts to avian species, a robust mortality monitoring protocol is needed. We are currently investigating what the appropriate level of monitoring should be for these large-scale solar facilities, but in the interim, we are recommending 30% coverage (rather than the 25% mentioned in the conditions of certification) evenly distributed with respect to distance from the power tower or with greater effort near the tower. Once data on mortality from the site are being collected a power analysis might allow for this percentage to be adjusted to

ensure that monitoring is focused in areas where birds are most at risk. We believe that a more conservative approach to monitoring is appropriate until we have better data with respect to this technology and large-scale projects.

5. The original project was reconfigured to partially accommodate REAT agencies' concerns about impacts to the Mojave fringe-toed lizard and sand transport, but the permeability of sand through modified project is still uncertain. We will review the recently docketed sand transport study and look forward to the final analysis in the FSA.

6. We look forward to working through the conditions of certification in detail with the REAT agencies as the new data are integrated and the analyses are completed that demonstrate how implementation of the conditions avoid and minimize impacts to biological resources.

We request that this email be docketed for the record. Please let me know if you have any questions.

Thanks,

--

Jody Fraser, Biologist
Palm Springs Fish and Wildlife Office
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
777 E. Tahquitz Canyon Way, Suite 208
Palm Springs, CA 92262
760.322.2070 ph x207
760.322.4648 fax
jody_fraser@fws.gov