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STATE LANDS COMMISSION AND BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT ANNOUNCE INTENT TO PURSUE LANDMARK LAND EXCHANGE

Agreement will protect conservation lands and benefit retired teachers

Sacramento – The California State Lands Commission and the Federal Bureau of Land Management announced today an historic agreement to pursue an exchange of state school lands with federal lands. The exchange, slated to be executed in phases, will protect conservation lands, facilitate renewable energy development, and provide revenue benefitting California's retired teachers.

"A strategic decision was made in 2011 to turn the state's scattered patchwork of non-revenue generating land into functional contiguous parcels that reshape the State Land Commission's revenue portfolio to include more sources of renewable energy," said Gavin Newsom, Lieutenant Governor and Chair of the State Lands Commission. "This exchange is a case illustration of that approach, which is projected to significantly increase the Commission's surface-lease revenue and contribute to state and federal goals of environmental protection, renewable energy, and greenhouse gas reduction."

School lands, which are scattered in a checkerboard pattern throughout the state, were granted by the United States to California in 1853. Revenue from these lands goes to the California State Teachers' Retirement System to support retired teachers. In 2012, the Commission and Bureau of Land Management agreed to pursue exchanges that consolidate scattered school lands into contiguous parcels for renewable energy development. The Memorandum of Intent signed today is consistent with this agreement.

"The proposed land exchange advances the state and federal conservation strategy of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan by consolidating federal lands within National Conservation Lands," said Bureau of Land Management California State Director Jim Kenna. "The consolidation of federal lands promotes the continuity of wilderness and wildlife corridors while supporting renewable energy goals."

The land exchanges will protect and conserve valuable biological and other natural resources, and provide public access and recreational opportunities. In Phase I, approximately 61,000 acres of non-revenue generating school lands in federal wilderness and other conservation areas will be exchanged for approximately 5,600 acres of federal lands with the potential for, or already developed with, renewable energy facilities. The exchange is based on equal land values determined by a preliminary market valuation and may change after the formal appraisals. The lands are in San Bernardino, Inyo and Riverside counties.

Renewable energy is a key element of California's strategy to reduce reliance on fossil fuels and greenhouse gas emissions. California is on a path to achieve its 33 percent renewable energy portfolio standard for 2020 and gearing up to achieve a 50 percent goal in 2030. The land exchanges support the DRECP goals of protecting and conserving desert ecosystems and developing renewable energy.

"We are pleased to be standing with the State Lands Commission and Bureau of Land Management as they move forward with this important agreement," said California Energy Commissioner Karen Douglas. "These landmark exchanges will help the state and our federal partners advance our renewable energy and conservation goals in the California desert while providing revenue to benefit California's retired teachers."

The DRECP is a state-federal planning effort covering 22.5 million acres in the desert, including 10 million acres of public lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management. The Bureau of Land Management Land Use Plan and Final Environmental Impact Statement of the DRECP are expected this year.

The Commission and the Bureau of Land Management today memorialized their commitment to work expeditiously toward completing the land exchanges. Subsequent environmental reviews, Congressional notification, and approvals from the Department of Justice, Bureau of Land Management and State Lands Commission are required. This is an important milestone in advancing state and federal legislative direction, and moving forward, will involve working collaboratively with stakeholders and the public.

Please visit <https://www.flickr.com/photos/blmcalifornia/sets/72157658979371885> for photos of the signing and lands proposed for exchange.

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