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*Comment Received From: Lynn Boulton
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22-IEPR-02 Land Use Screens

Additional submitted attachment is included below.

Dear CEC/IEPR Team,

While I strongly believe climate change is a threat to our planet and support the state in taking bold actions to meet the goal of 100% renewable energy by 2045, I also want to preserve our flora and fauna and our unique species. The Eastern Sierra, i.e., Mono and Inyo Counties, have intact ecosystems that need to be preserved for the future as well. We already have many activities that degrade the environment and impact wildlife in the Eastern Sierra: gold exploration that will lead to mining, over grazing on public lands, growing recreation including illegal off-roading on public lands, and excessive groundwater pumping by Los Angeles Department of Water and Power.

A lot of thought needs to go into appropriate siting of large-scale solar or wind projects in the Eastern Sierra to not add to the existing threats to wildlife. Land Screens 1 and 3 cover a significant amount of land in Mono and Inyo Counties. If projects were to materialize according to these maps, they would have a devastating impact to wildlife, endangered species, and our local economy.

I ask that the CEC release the next iteration of the land screen maps for public review before they go into the Annual CEC policy report in February and are adopted for planning purposes. It is likely there will be many significant changes from this round of public input. We should have an opportunity to see what is actually incorporated before it becomes final.

Listed below are my concerns related to Mono and Inyo Counties:

- We have some of the most intact land in a natural state that qualifies for 30x30 and/or America the Beautiful. Much of the land marked for energy development is land that could be included in 30x30.
- There should be a cap on how many sites in a region can be developed. If all of the proposed sites in the Eastern Sierra shown as orange or blue are developed, the impacts to wildlife would be devastating, wildlife migration corridors would be cut off, wetlands would be lost, climate refugia would be lost, and more. In the Eastern Sierra, only small-scale projects should be considered; not large-scale.
- If the multi-use lands are developed for green energy, then there must be more protections on the lands that are left, to allow some land for wildlife to live without frequent human intrusions.
- Some of the terrain marked for solar on the map is on steep mountainsides, at 8,000 feet and higher, facing east. Some will be under snow for 7 months of the year. Some of the land marked for wind development aren't windy and our windiest location is not marked for wind. I wasn't able to pull up the slope input dataset/map to see if it is

correct. Based on what is in orange or blue, it seemed to include slopes > 10 degrees. It just doesn't make sense to site solar or wind in some of these locations. The map should only include viable locations.

- Some of the proposed sites are in remote areas, far from "the grid" or a substation where powerlines don't exist. To install powerlines to connect these sites to the grid would significantly impact wildlife and intact habitats.
- Some of the sites are small bits of land that will support only very small solar arrays or a few windmills that probably wouldn't justify the cost of the infrastructure or even the cost of the project, especially in remote places. They should be taken off the table if they aren't realistically viable locations.
- Consider working in wildfire risk in the baseline maps. There are areas of high wildfire risk in the Eastern Sierra. Projects are underway to thin the forest to minimize the risk because it is a major concern. If intact land is developed for renewable energy and what isn't developed is burned and converts to cheatgrass, then it leaves little habitat for wildlife. The probability that some habitat will be lost to wildfire needs to be considered in determining how much land should be developed for renewable energy.
<https://capuc.maps.arcgis.com/apps/webappviewer/index.html?id=5bdb921d747a46929d9f00dbdb6d0fa2>

More specifically:

1. The habitat for the Bi-state Sage Grouse (BSSG) should be excluded with a 4-mile buffer zone around each lek. A [recent court decision](#) put the BSSG back on the USFWS endangered species list as a candidate threatened species. Much of our area is Bi-state Sage Grouse habitat. The anchor population is in the Bodie Hills that has patches earmarked for solar and wind development. The second largest BSSG population is in Long Valley that also is covered in orange and blue. The proposed solar/wind sites around the Sonora Junction would impact the BSSG as well. The infrastructure to support large-scale renewable projects provide perches for ravens. Ravens are the main predator and threat of the Bi-state Sage Grouse in the Eastern Sierra.
2. The Mono Basin National Scenic Area should be excluded.
3. The new Alabama Hills National Scenic Area and Special Recreation Management Area should be excluded. <https://www.blm.gov/sites/default/files/docs/2022-09/AlabamaHillsNationalScenicArea%20FY21%20Managers%20Report.pdf>
4. Efforts are underway to designate lands within Inyo and Mono Counties as National Monuments, National Conservation Lands, or Wildlife Refuges. Before the maps are finalized and offered to companies to propose projects, there needs to be a way to let

them know of these efforts. There will be a lot of opposition for siting renewable energy projects in areas that a large number of people and organizations are trying to protect.

5. All of Conway Ranch should be excluded. It is Mono County property and it has an Eastern Sierra Land Trust conservation easement in perpetuity as mitigation for other environmental damage elsewhere. It is hard to tell, but it looks like part of it is in the orange. The overlay is lost when zooming in.
6. There are conservation easements on the land in Adobe Meadow/Adobe Valley that is designated for solar. The Eastern Sierra Land Trust put those easements in place for perpetuity. You need to include their easements in your baseline dataset. What good is it to have a patch of land preserved for conservation and wildlife when it is boxed in with solar panels?
7. Most of the ACECs in the Eastern Sierra have been excluded except the Owens Lake ACEC (ACEC003280). The Owens Lake ACEC is in the input dataset, but wasn't excluded in the Screen 1 maps.
8. The Mono Basin Kutzadika'a Tribe should be able to live in their homeland, the Mono Basin. It should be a priority that they be allowed to acquire public land before it is converted to other uses. On March 1, 1931 Congress passed HR 11969 that prevents the transfer of any public land in the Mono Basin in order to protect the watershed that flows into the Los Angeles Aqueduct. It prevents the Tribe from acquiring land in the Mono Basin and it should also prevent utility companies from receiving or leasing the land as well. If that law is changed, then the Tribe's injustices should be addressed first.
9. California and National Cultural Heritage Sites should be excluded. There is a new one, Patsiata, that covers the Owens Lake and its surrounds.
https://ohp.parks.ca.gov/pages/1067/files/CA_Inyo%20County_Patsiata%20Historic%20District_PUBLI_C.pdf
10. Any lands that are under legal mitigation agreements or court orders should be excluded. Most of the land and waters in the Owens Valley is managed according to the terms of the Inyo-LADWP Long Term Water Agreement (LTWA) and a 1997 MOU based on a 1991 Environmental Impact Report. The LTWA/1991 EIR also requires that LADWP land not be degraded. Parcels are identified as a certain type of habitat: A=desert scrub and not groundwater dependent, B=groundwater dependent shrub, C=groundwater dependent meadow, D=riparian, E=irrigated. The rule is that a type can't change to a lower type i.e., B parcels can't become type A habitat, C parcels can't become type B habitat, etc. This applies to most of the Owens Valley—documented here: https://www.inyowater.org/wp-content/uploads/legacy/Water_Resources/water_agreement/agr_exh.htm

11. Also, there is a list of the mitigation projects that were court ordered under the LTWA, the 1991 EIR, and 1997 MOU. If mitigation is not continued and the land is covered in solar and wind projects, then LADWP would have to stop the project that the mitigation was to compensate, i.e., the second barrel of the Los Angeles Aqueduct.
https://experience.arcgis.com/experience/44b652a16c4b443b9b4a2e7dc3fcb91/?data_id=dataSource_1-17d49adeefc-layer-4%3A3%2CdataSource_2-17e4177851f-layer-9%3A1&draft=true&org=inycounty.
12. Inyo County passed a General Plan amendment in 2015 called the Renewable Energy General Plan Amendment (<https://www.inycounty.us/sites/default/files/2020-04/FinalREGPA33015.pdf>) that defines where and how large solar projects can be within the county.
13. The Owens Valley Groundwater Basin is controlled by two entities, LADWP and the Owens Valley Groundwater Authority. The LADWP part of the basin is considered an adjudicated basin by SGMA. Large-scale solar projects could change how much precipitation goes to recharging the basin and should be taken into account.
14. There are already two large transmission lines running the length of the Owens Valley: the DC Pacific Intertie/LADWP 500kV and a LADWP 230kV transmission line. Any windmills would need to be a certain distance from these power lines. The map shows them going through proposed wind sites in places.
15. If the LADWP pastures in the Owens Valley are covered in solar, then it will push out cattle ranching, a big part of the Inyo and Mono County economies. Ranching in Inyo County affects ranching in Mono County. Cattle graze in Inyo County in the winter and then are moved to Mono County for the summer.
16. Some of the BLM and USFS multi-use land is designated for solar that have active grazing leases on them. Changing the use of them to solar development will impact the local economy.
17. There should be no solar panels or windmills along the bird flyways, Important Bird Areas, or large bodies of water, e.g., Bridgeport Reservoir, Black Lake, Mono Lake, Crowley Lake, the Owens Lake, Klondike Lake, Tinemaha Reservoir, Calvert Slough, or the Blackrock Waterfowl Management Area. The Oasis Ranch area is also on a bird migration corridor and it is slated to be covered in solar panels.
18. Wetlands and climate refugia should be excluded. We can identify many of them. To start, the Bodie Hills, the Sweetwater Mountains, Adobe Valley, and the area around the Sonora Junction are climate refugia habitats. All of the Bodie Hills served as climate refugia throughout the Holocene documented by Kirk Halford because of its elevation and that it receives snow in the winter. The Sweetwater Mountains are a wonderful mosaic of wet meadows, forest, sagebrush, springs, and streams and are at elevation

and get snow in the winter. The Burcham Flat area is an incredible rapture feeding area. They hover along the ridge and search for rodents in the flat. Also, Adobe Valley has a high groundwater table with Adobe Creek, Pizona Springs, River Springs Lake, and Black Lake that create a unique wetland and alkali meadow habitat and climate refugia. It supports a myriad of insects, birds, and wild horses. The area around the Sonora Junction along the Little Walker River, Junction Creek, Burcham Creek, and Fales Hot Springs has wetland meadows that are climate refugia. These sites and all sites with streams and springs in the Eastern Sierra should be excluded in Screen 3.

19. The beauty of landscape is an asset for both counties. Tourism and recreation are important parts of the economy. People come to the Eastern Sierra from around the world and the state, but most come from Southern California for relief from their urban setting. Many segments along Highway 395 are designated as scenic highway along with Highway 89, 120 west, 158, 168 west, 168 at Oasis, 178, 190, 203, and 266 (<https://dot.ca.gov/programs/design/lap-landscape-architecture-and-community-livability/lap-liv-i-scenic-highways>). The Mono County slogan is “Wild by Nature”. If all one sees along these highways are solar farms, it will not be scenic.
20. Solar panels should be placed over the Los Angeles Aqueduct, on every rooftop and parking lot before taking ranch lands out of commission. There are several vacant K-Mart-like stores with large parking lots that could be used for several megawatts of solar. Let’s do in-fill first.

Both counties have already paid an enormous environmental price for LADWP’s energy and water exports for the past 100 years. While there may be several locations that would work for small scale solar, I don’t think large-scale projects are appropriate anywhere in the Eastern Sierra.