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Docket Stamp Updated:	1/11/2024 10:41:15 AM
Docket Number:	23-ERDD-01
Project Title:	Electric Program Investment Charge (EPIC)
TN #:	253861
Document Title:	Mojave Desert Land Trust Comments - Research needs in CA Desert Region
Description:	N/A
Filer:	System
Organization:	Mojave Desert Land Trust
Submitter Role:	Public
Submission Date:	1/11/2024 10:20:32 AM
Docketed Date:	1/11/2024

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Docket Number:	23-ERDD-01
Project Title:	Electric Program Investment Charge (EPIC)
TN #:	253861
Document Title:	Susy Boyd Comments - Research needs in CA Desert Region
Description:	N/A
Filer:	System
Organization:	Susy Boyd
Submitter Role:	Public
Submission Date:	1/11/2024 9:40:52 AM
Docketed Date:	1/11/2024

Comment Received From: Susy Boyd
Submitted On: 1/11/2024
Docket Number: 23-ERDD-01

Research needs in CA Desert Region

Hello EPIC Staff,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on EPIC's proposal to fund \$3 million towards research that will address environmental impacts resulting from renewable energy projects. Mojave Desert Land Trust was founded in 2006 as a nonprofit 501(c) 3 desert conservation organization headquartered in Joshua Tree, CA. MDLT acquires, restores and protects biologically and culturally important lands throughout a 26 million-acre service area in the California Desert, from north of Death Valley National Park to the Mexican border.

Our acquisitions and resource stewardship programs focus on inholdings within national parks and preserves, national monuments, wilderness areas, areas of critical environmental concern, and wildlife corridors. Every land transaction supports the vision of the Mojave and Colorado Deserts with interconnected, permanently protected scenic and natural areas hosting a diversity of native plants and wildlife. To date, we have acquired over 120,000 acres of pristine desert land and conveyed over 55,000 acres to federal and state agencies while retaining and managing more than 56,000 acres across the California Desert.

As a conservation organization dedicated to service within the California Desert Conservation Area, we are a key stakeholder for desert related issues. Moreover, our state's desert region has been a primary focus area for renewable energy projects, arguably more than any other region of the state. The desert region has been persistently underfunded with research monies and is woefully behind our state's related ecosystems in terms of a knowledge base with which to start. For these reasons, we ask you to prioritize our requests. Per our Executive Director Kelly Herbinson, a desert tortoise biologist and expert who has also worked extensively with RE projects, these are our organization's suggestions for research funding:

- 1) Quantify the cumulative effects of habitat and biodiversity loss across species. Include birds, insects, pollinators, etc.
- 2) Quantify the cumulative loss of natural carbon sequestration capacity
- 3) Quantify effects of fracturing habitat and impact to wildlife connectivity

Research funds would also be well spent on avenues of prevention of damage to the fragile desert ecosystem such as solar installations within built communities, or the recently presented bill on solar installation along roadways. The less damage to the desert ecosystem, the more our natural and working desert lands can continue their role in storing carbon deep underground in soil caliche layers.

While recognizing our state's current budget difficulties, we also ask that the allotted

funds be expanded. As one workshop participant noted, the current fund is inadequate to cover the needs presented across the state.

This is a much-needed opportunity as demand for solar projects accelerates. We thank you for the opportunity to provide comment.

Kelly Herbinson
Executive Director
Mojave Desert Land Trust

[Susy Boyd
Public Policy Coordinator
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