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Subj: DRECP Scoping comments, CEC Docket No. 09-RENEW EO-01/Scoping

Ref:1) State of California Natural Resources Agency News release dated July 28, 2011
2) Recommendations of Independent Science Advisors for the California Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP
3) California Energy Commission Docket Number 09-AFC-9, "Solar Millennium, Ridgecrest Solar Power Project"

This comment letter contains both general comments and comments specific to the Docket Number 09-AFC-9, "Solar Millennium, Ridgecrest Solar Power Project"

General comments.

1) n spite of its arid status and harsh conditions the desert environment is fragile. It is a place of little water- both surface and ground water. The plant and animal ecology is closely tied to water availability. In many desert valleys the available groundwater is leftover remnants from earlier (Pleistocene) wetter geological times and there is little or no available recharge to replenish any losses.
2) These facilities require too much land for the amount of power they produce. What happens to all this land if the operators quit? The learned body of scientific advisers who have many correct observations and recommendations need to advise the legislators that "green" projects are really not environmentally sound projects.
3) The California desert should not become a "dumping" ground for things not wanted in the urban areas of the state. These areas only want the positive results they think they will achieve. Most of the environmentally sensitive plants and animals cannot be relocated. They will die. With our changing climate it will be very difficult if not impossible to re-establish habitat to its former condition. In other words the area in question will have its habitat permanently destroyed. To have this happen over many thousands of acres of desert lands is unconscionable.
4) **The Science Advisors report (ref 2) above should be followed as closely as possible in the DRECP draft EIR/EIS.** The recommendation that maximum use of already disturbed sites is paramount. It is not possible to mitigate for lost habitat not only including endangered species but the myriad of rare plants and animals that are not listed. **The Principles for Siting and Designing Renewable Energy Projects needs to be adopted in its entirety and used as a guide to the construction of the detailed EIR/EIS (summarized on p vi of ref 2).** Likewise the Principles for Mitigating Impacts

(summarized on p vii of ref 2) must be incorporated. Of special note are the comments made on page vii of the futility of attempts to use translocation as a mitigation.

5) Unfortunately, the DRECP guidance is very late in coming forth. As a consequence many of the fast track projects are already underway in the construction phase. Much of the environmental analysis that was done in support of these projects was faulty and very superficial. As an example of an egregious environmental violation created by the fast track process, compounded by a politically motivated CEC Commission, we submit the Ivanpah Solar Project (Docket 07-AFC-5). **The errors that were made during the fast track process must never be repeated.**
6) **It is essential that a very thorough environmental review be made of each and every proposed project site.** Many rare minor species are being ignored (desert banded gecko, for example). The environmental reviews so far have given only cursory examination of the water supply issues, soil disturbance and dust issues, impacts of changing watercourse routes and viewscape impacts. Especially serious has been the very weak evaluation of cultural resources at many project sites. It is not sufficient to just review the National Register but detailed on the ground evaluation also must be done. Many sites have not only the easily recognizable artifact assemblages of Clovis or more modern cultures, but early man as well. It is essential that the literature be thoroughly examined as well as field evaluation by personnel familiar with the more primitive artifacts of the Mojave culture. It is impossible to recover or to mitigate archeological materials that are destroyed in site preparation. Curating what materials that can be found as the site is graded off is woefully adequate. More and more realization of the presence of early man (Pleistocene) on the Mojave and Colorado deserts is clear in the published record. **This aspect (presence of early man in the Mojave and Colorado deserts) must be incorporated in the EIR/EIS process that the DRECP is creating**.

Comments specific to the Ridgecrest Solar Power Project (RSPP) site (09-AFC-9) (ref 3 above)

1) Much can be learned from the abortive attempt by Solar Millennium to site a solar power plant in the southwest area of the Indian Wells Valley. The main argument offered by that company for the site chosen is that the Indian Wells valley has be highest isolation of any site in the continental US and perhaps in the world (source: Scott Galati, Solar Millennium General Counsel, at early workshops and later hearings). This claim may be useful to encourage investors but is technically bogus. The old insolation data supporting this idea was limited and not representative of modern weather patterns in the summer in the Indian Wells Valley.
2) Furthermore, Solar Millennium was forced to give up wet cooling since the Indian Wells Valley is in serious long term groundwater overdraft, so the slightly higher total energy output from the supposed higher insolation was buried in the loss of efficiency in going to dry cooling. Far more attention needs to be paid to the water supply issues for these projects- specifically for the Ridgecrest project. It is completely unreasonable and against California water law to support a new user at the expense of the existing users. In an overdrafted basin, all water savings from conservation must accrue to the existing users not to a new user (e.g., a solar power project).
3) The site chosen for the RSPP lies adjacent or within the El PasoWash. This wash drains an area of about 40 square miles of substantially volcanic mountains. The soil derived

from the erosion of the basalts of the the El paso Mountains yields an especially fertile soil. Even in today's drier climate there is a very obvious orogenic effect from these mountains yielding a greater rainfall in the area. **These observations are not included specifically in the RSPP EIR/EIS but there is mention in the biological assessment that there is "something special" about the site.** Indeed there is- both biologically and culturally.

4) The El Paso wash drains in a north- northeast direction ending at China Lake (now dry most of the year). There was no discussion in the cultural section of the RSPP EIR/EIS of the relationship of the southern portion of the wash (El Paso Mountains and the RSPP site) and the Federally listed petroglyph sites just north of China Lake. In fact, there are many Coso style petroglyph sites near the RSPP. **The El Paso wash not only provides for high quality habitat today, but in earlier times provided for a well watered travel route for early man and later Indians.**

5) A paper published in January 2011, in the Pacific Coast Archeological Society Quarterly, vol 43 nos 1 and 2 describes an early man site on the east shore of Pleistocene China Lake. In fact, there is Mojave culture evidence for most if not all of the El Paso wash. None of this was described in the EIR/EIS. If the RSPP were to actually be revitalized, the early man site impacts will become part of the revised record. Although most of the recognized early man sites are at or near water, the early man evidence will ultimately be found to be more diffuse and widespread than is currently realized. This reality must be incorporated into the DRECP guidance in general. **It is obvious that early man evidence is far more valuable to our cultural understanding than later and much more prevalent archeological materials.**

6) The RSPP EIR/EIS was deficient in many areas including those just discussed. However, the biological assessment was far more thorough than for virtually any other California desert project. The credit for this necessarily goes to the CEC staff and to the knowledgeable local citizens who provided key inputs and motivation to set the record straight. It is unfortunate that other project sites did not receive the same scrutiny. **The DRECP guidelines must provide the motivation for thorough environmental evaluation otherwise missing.**

7) It must always be kept in mind the renewable energy projects that are being discussed and built on the California Desert are in no way "green". They are in fact destructive in every way possible to the local habitat, cultural values, viewscape and often to local scarce water supplies. **It is not possible to mitigate for the losses inherent in these projects. The DRECP guidance will necessarily have an inherent assumption of project value that will not be based on fact. The lessons learned for the RSPP must be incorporated into the DRECP guidance.** Our natural world cannot speak out for itself. That is our job.

Signed, Don and Judie Decker