

# DOCKET

09-RENEW EO-01

DATE \_\_\_\_\_

RECD. MAY 16 2012

**RE:** DRECP Development Scenarios

**To:** California Energy Commission  
Dockets Office, MS-4  
Docket No. 09-RENEW EO-01  
1516 Ninth Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512  
[docket@energy.state.ca.us](mailto:docket@energy.state.ca.us)

**From:** Stephanie Weigel, Morongo Basin Regional Land Use Planner, Sonoran Institute  
74485 National Park Drive, Twentynine Palms, CA 92277  
760-367-5567 [sweigel@sonoraninstitute.org](mailto:sweigel@sonoraninstitute.org)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the DRECP development scenarios considered at the April 25 and 26, 2012, Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan Stakeholder Committee Meeting. These comments are particular to the **Morongo Basin region** of the DRECP planning area, and are thus focused on **Development Scenarios 5 and 6**.

The focus of these comments is the geographic overlap between the development focus areas of Scenarios 5 and 6 and two areas of conservation interest in the Morongo Basin, namely:

1. The areas within the **wildlife linkage designs** developed by SC Wildlands in the *South Coast Missing Linkages Design* and *Joshua Tree-29 Palms Linkage Design* reports, and
2. The parcels identified by the Morongo Basin Open Space Group's **Conservation Priority Setting** process **as priority conservation areas**.

## Map I and Map II

The attached Map I and Map II show portions of the wildlife linkage designs, indicated in red, that overlap the development focus areas of Scenarios 5 and 6. Were development to occur in the areas indicated in red, wildlife connectivity could be impacted or blocked between two large protected areas—the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center and the Joshua Tree National Park. Habitat for the species found in these portions of the linkage design, which were designed to serve as “umbrella areas” to protect a diversity of species, could also be impacted. The proximity of the red areas to the park and base deserves particular attention and consideration, and the impacts of intense development in those areas should be considered in the context of the missions of the base and the park. A similar overlay process to the one reflected in these maps is suggested for *all* of the DRECP scenarios with the linkage designs identified by SC Wildlands, including those in the recently published “A Linkage Network for the California Deserts.”

## Map III and Map IV

Map III and IV display the outlines (in red) of priority parcels from the Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting analysis that overlap development focus areas of Scenarios 5 and 6. Parcels outlined in red are those that either ranked “high priority” for any one of the five conservation values considered in the conservation priority analysis (described briefly below) or parcels that ranked as “high composite priority” (2 or more of the conservation values were high priority) or “moderate-high composite priority” (1 high priority or 3 moderate priority conservation values).

Both maps show a large number of priority conservation parcels that overlap development focus areas in the Pipes Wash region between the Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center and Joshua Tree National Park. Natural processes could be blocked or impacted in these areas, affecting the Big Morongo Canyon Preserve as well as the proposed Sand to Snow National Monument area, of which the Preserve is a part. Along with privately protected lands owned by The Wildlands Conservancy in this area, this portion of the Morongo Basin, with connections to the San Bernardino National Forest, is a critical conservation area that should be considered in the context of existing protected lands and maintenance of natural conservation processes.

Map IV (Scenario 6) depicts a number of conservation priority parcels near the south of the Marine base that overlay the aforementioned wildlife linkage design areas; development in these areas could impact or block connectivity into other areas of the linkage design, as well as have potential impacts on the base mission due to their proximity to areas where training and conservation activities are undertaken. In addition, overlap areas between priority parcels and Scenario 6 in the Copper Mountain and Wonder Valley portions of the Morongo Basin contain residential areas that could be impacted by energy development in the vicinity. Linkage design connectivity could also be impacted in these areas.

### **Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting**

The Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting (CPS) Project was undertaken between 2008 and 2010 as part of ongoing efforts to support the basin's long-term development and conservation. The project was based on conservation goals that originated in community values and are grounded in conservation science. Five conservation values were chosen by community stakeholders and priority determined at a parcel level using criteria defined for each value. The five conservation values mapped in the analysis are: **1. Park Mission, 2. Marine Base Mission, 3. Community Identity, 4. Wildlife Habitat & Connectivity, and 5. Community Views & Treasures.** All of these conservation values are closely tied to the economic engines of the Morongo Basin, which include the Marine base, national park, and the tourism economy. Morongo Basin treasures such as dark night skies, desert vistas and open spaces viewable along the highways and from local backyards are highly valued by both local residents and visitors.

### **Summary**

The attached maps and above discussion are being provided to the DRECP process to support the studied consideration of whether DRECP development focus areas are appropriately located in areas of the Morongo Basin that have been identified by wildlife linkage design studies and community stakeholders as conservation areas important to supporting wildlife connectivity and conservation values in the area. This higher resolution look at the Morongo Basin area can provide additional information to the DRECP process that may have not been available at the time the scenarios were developed. As well, the linkage network identified across the California desert should be included in the determination of development areas. Please contact Stephanie Weigel to obtain the supporting GIS data for the CPS analysis, and SC Wildlands ([www.scwildlands.org](http://www.scwildlands.org)) to obtain the linkage design data.

### **Attachments**

Map I. Morongo Basin linkage designs and Scenario 5

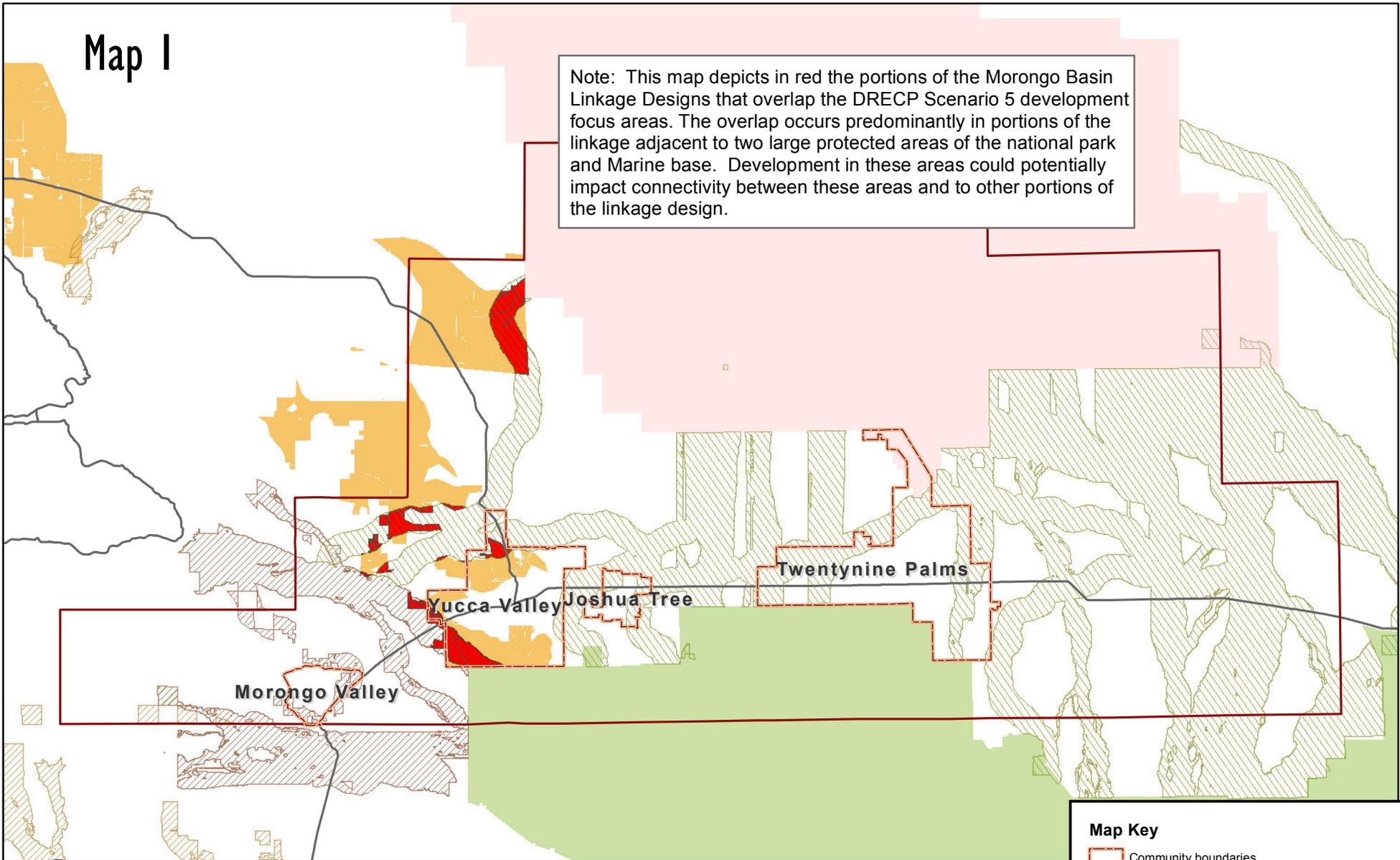
Map II. Morongo Basin linkage designs and Scenario 6

Map III. Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting high priority parcels and Scenario 5

Map IV. Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting high priority parcels and Scenario 6

# Map I

Note: This map depicts in red the portions of the Morongo Basin Linkage Designs that overlap the DRECP Scenario 5 development focus areas. The overlap occurs predominantly in portions of the linkage adjacent to two large protected areas of the national park and Marine base. Development in these areas could potentially impact connectivity between these areas and to other portions of the linkage design.



## Morongo Basin Linkage Designs and DRECP Scenario 5



0 2.5 5 10 Miles

Map for discussion purposes only.  
 Map data deemed but not guaranteed accurate.  
 Map created May 2012 by SJ Weigel,  
 sweigel@sonoraninstitute.org.  
 Linkage designs developed by  
 SC Wildlands. Reports available at  
[www.scwildlands.com/reports](http://www.scwildlands.com/reports).  
 DRECP\_scenario5\_Linkages.mxd

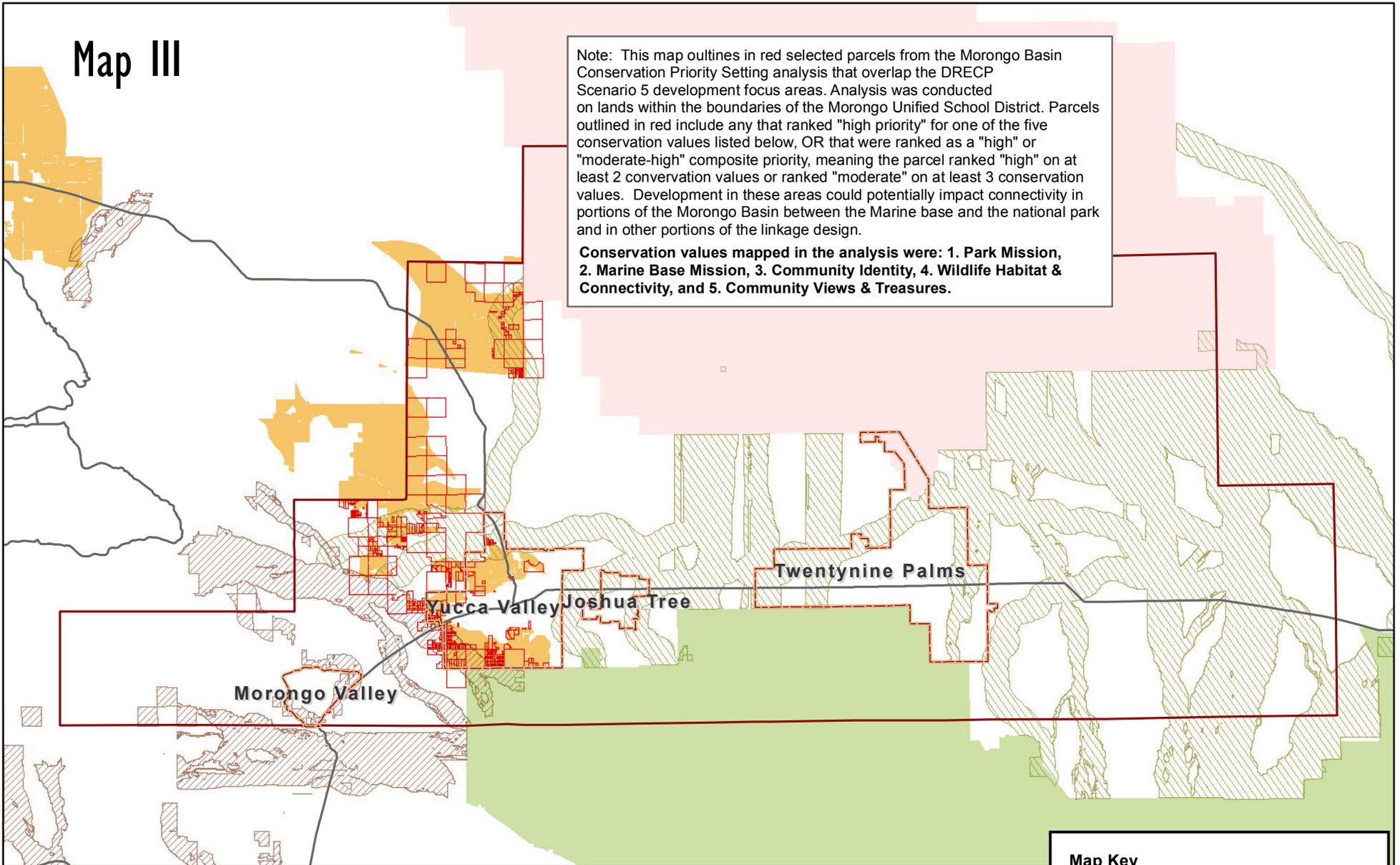
### Map Key

- Community boundaries
- Morongo Unified School District
- State highways
- Joshua Tree National Park
- Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center
- Joshua Tree-29 Palms Linkage Design
- San Bernardino-Little San Bernardino Linkage Design
- South Coast Missing Linkages outside Morongo Basin
- Scenario 5 in Morong Linkages
- Scenario 5 Development Focus Areas

# Map III

Note: This map outlines in red selected parcels from the Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting analysis that overlap the DRECP Scenario 5 development focus areas. Analysis was conducted on lands within the boundaries of the Morongo Unified School District. Parcels outlined in red include any that ranked "high priority" for one of the five conservation values listed below, OR that were ranked as a "high" or "moderate-high" composite priority, meaning the parcel ranked "high" on at least 2 conservation values or ranked "moderate" on at least 3 conservation values. Development in these areas could potentially impact connectivity in portions of the Morongo Basin between the Marine base and the national park and in other portions of the linkage design.

**Conservation values mapped in the analysis were: 1. Park Mission, 2. Marine Base Mission, 3. Community Identity, 4. Wildlife Habitat & Connectivity, and 5. Community Views & Treasures.**



## Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting high priority parcels and DRECP Scenario 5



0 2.5 5 10 Miles

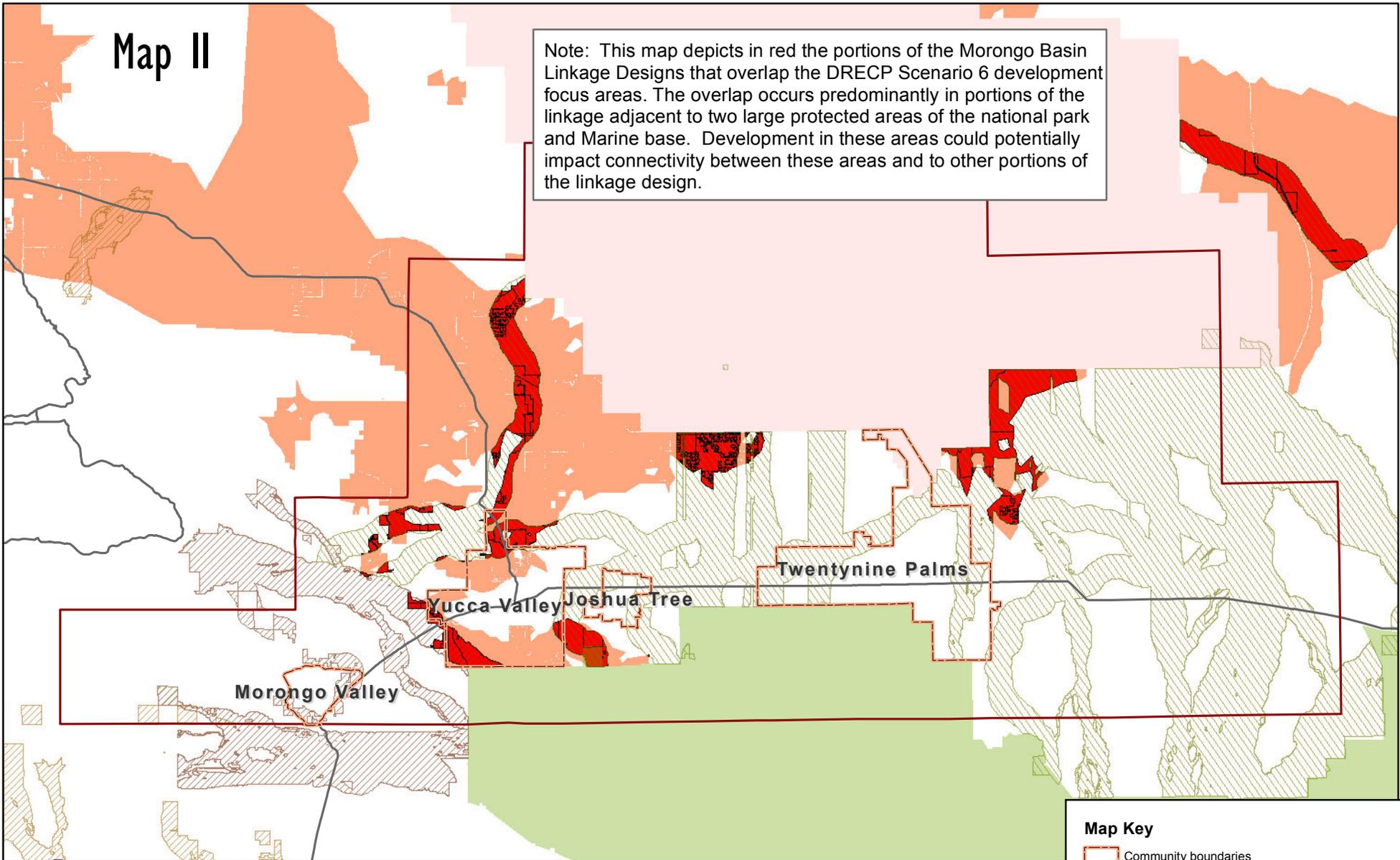
Map for discussion purposes only.  
 Map data deemed but not guaranteed accurate.  
 Map created May 2012 by SJ Weigel,  
 sweigel@sonoraninstitute.org.  
 Linkage designs developed by  
 SC Wildlands. Reports available at  
[www.scwildlands.com/reports](http://www.scwildlands.com/reports).  
 DRECP\_scenario5\_MBOSG\_CPS.mxd

### Map Key

- Community boundaries
- Morongo Unified School District
- State highways
- Joshua Tree National Park
- Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center
- South Coast Missing Linkages Linkage Designs
- Joshua Tree-29 Palms Linkage Design
- Conservation Priority Setting Priority Parcels
- DRECP Scenario 5 Development Focus Areas

# Map II

Note: This map depicts in red the portions of the Morongo Basin Linkage Designs that overlap the DRECP Scenario 6 development focus areas. The overlap occurs predominantly in portions of the linkage adjacent to two large protected areas of the national park and Marine base. Development in these areas could potentially impact connectivity between these areas and to other portions of the linkage design.



## Morongo Basin Linkage Designs and DRECP Scenario 6



Map for discussion purposes only.  
 Map data deemed but not guaranteed accurate.  
 Map created May 2012 by SJ Weigel,  
 sweigel@sonoraninstitute.org.  
 Linkage designs developed by  
 SC Wildlands. Reports available at  
[www.scwildlands.com/reports](http://www.scwildlands.com/reports).  
 DRECP\_scenario6\_Linkages.mxd

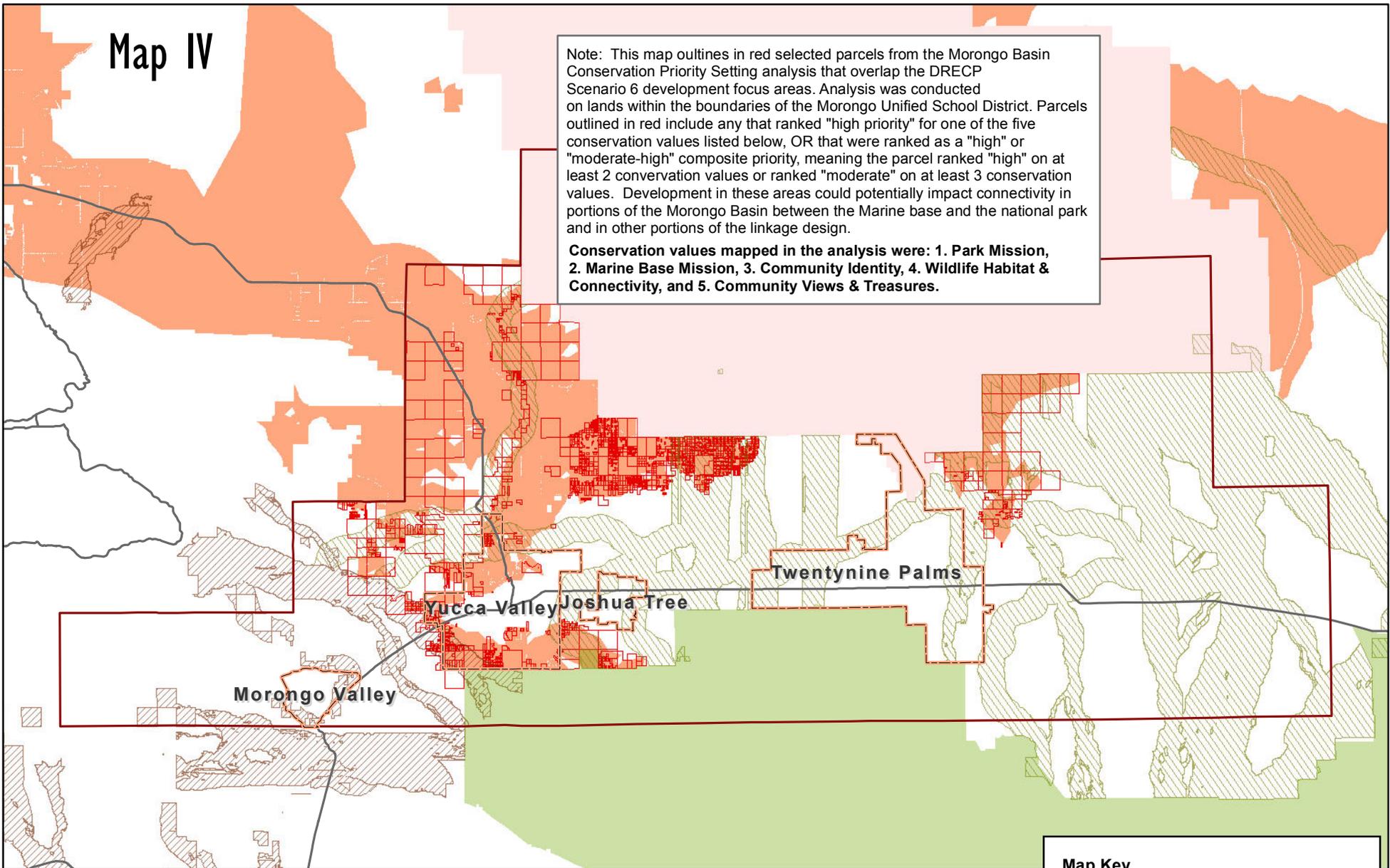
**Map Key**

- Community boundaries
- Morongo Unified School District
- State highways
- Joshua Tree National Park
- Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center
- Joshua Tree-29 Palms Linkage Design
- San Bernardino-Little San Bernardino Linkage Design
- South Coast Missing Linkages outside Morongo Basin
- Scenario 6 in Morongo Linkages
- Scenario 6 Development Focus Areas

# Map IV

Note: This map outlines in red selected parcels from the Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting analysis that overlap the DRECP Scenario 6 development focus areas. Analysis was conducted on lands within the boundaries of the Morongo Unified School District. Parcels outlined in red include any that ranked "high priority" for one of the five conservation values listed below, OR that were ranked as a "high" or "moderate-high" composite priority, meaning the parcel ranked "high" on at least 2 conservation values or ranked "moderate" on at least 3 conservation values. Development in these areas could potentially impact connectivity in portions of the Morongo Basin between the Marine base and the national park and in other portions of the linkage design.

**Conservation values mapped in the analysis were:** 1. Park Mission, 2. Marine Base Mission, 3. Community Identity, 4. Wildlife Habitat & Connectivity, and 5. Community Views & Treasures.



## Morongo Basin Conservation Priority Setting high priority parcels and DRECP Scenario 6



0 2.5 5 10 Miles

Map for discussion purposes only.  
 Map data deemed but not guaranteed accurate.  
 Map created May 2012 by SJ Weigel,  
 sweigel@sonoraninstitute.org.  
 Linkage designs developed by  
 SC Wildlands. Reports available at  
[www.scwildlands.com/reports](http://www.scwildlands.com/reports).  
 DRECP\_scenario6\_MBOSG\_CPS.mxd

### Map Key

- Community boundaries
- Morongo Unified School District
- State highways
- Joshua Tree National Park
- Marine Corps Air Ground Combat Center
- South Coast Missing Linkages Linkage Designs
- Joshua Tree-29 Palms Linkage Design
- Conservation Priority Setting Priority Parcels
- DRECP Scenario 6 Development Focus Areas