

NATIONAL PARKS CONSERVATION ASSOCIATION

Protecting Parks for Future Generations

California Energy Commission

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National Parks Conservation Association's (NPCA) comments on the DFA's.

This letter serves as an addendum to the letter submitted May 23, 2012 to reflect updated DFA alternatives. Similarly, we have reviewed and support the joint letters produced by CBD/TWS and DOW/Sierra Club/NRDC as they relate to the protection of natural and cultural resources. While being supportive, we also would like to expand our comments to include more specific issues.

DRECP decision makers,

NPCA, the leading voice for the national parks, appreciates the opportunity to deliver public comment and submit written comments on the development focus areas (DFA). To participate in the development of alternatives we organized attendance for and public comment during the April 25-26, 2012 meeting in Ontario. We are presenting this document to speak to the refined alternatives as presented at the July 25-26 meeting.

NPCA believes that the August 9th deadline for comments on alternatives is premature, and will limit critically needed input. Strong alternatives are the building blocks of good public policy. While we do recognize and appreciate the opportunity to weigh-in on the development of alternatives, the time provided to do so has limited our opportunity to be as specific as we would like to be, especially related to variance lands which were recently introduced to this process. We ask that the Southcoast Wildlands connectivity reports¹, including *A Linkage Network for the California Desert*, and the Morongo Basin Open Space Group linkage reports² be consulted in order to protect critical, identified linkages.

¹<http://www.scwildlands.org/reports/Default.aspx>

²<http://morongobasinopenspacegroup.camp7.org/Default.aspx?pageId=223176>



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We are a national non-profit, well-represented in the California Desert, dedicated to protecting and enhancing the rich natural, cultural, and historic resources of the National Park Units found therein. We support and represent a membership and advocacy of over 700,000 individuals, including more than 100,000 Californians. We continue to work in partnership with the administration, federal and state agencies, communities, and elected officials to encourage a thoughtful approach to how and where we site industrial-scale renewable energy projects in the California desert. We continue to connect California desert residents, media, and decision makers to the DRECP process.

NPCA issued an advocacy alert in May 2012 that conveyed the voice of over 3,000 Californians who asked CEC and the DRECP decision makers to avoid siting projects adjacent to National Parks and to avoid the previous alternatives 4-6. In the new alternatives, many high conflict projects and areas have been either identified or removed. This is a step in the right direction, but does not adequately respond to those who weighed-in. Therefore, NPCA requests that identified high-conflict projects and areas be removed from consideration, including those adjacent to desert National Parks such as wind projects at “Dinosaur footprint” and “Silurian Valley” and solar projects such as Caithness Soda Mountains and Stateline. Other high conflict projects such as Hidden Hills, Black Butte Mesa wind, and Calico Solar are still under consideration and should be removed from this process because they are not located in DFAs or federal SEZ’s, and are remotely located away from other projects and have resource values that heightens their conflict and potential for litigation, and importantly, discourages needed community support for this important plan.

While several of the alternatives provide a good starting point, further development and refinement is required. Several of the updated alternatives do an improved job of reducing fragmentation of the greater Mojave and Colorado deserts. Introducing variance resurfaces community-based conflicts by re-adding lands in the Morongo Basin, the Northeast Mojave, adjacent to Pioneertown, and north and west of Baker. Many of the communities angered by these inclusions are critical voices needed to support this process.

NPCA remains concerned about the standard projection of 20,000+ Megawatts to be developed across alternatives. We understand that the acreage required to produce this wattage is principally influenced by which technology is assumed. This; however, does not allow for increased efficiency, reductions in usage through technological advances, or efficiencies in storage or transmission. It also doesn’t account for lands to be used by the Department of Defense as referenced in the recent MOU.



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The fundamental belief that California's deserts are required to shoulder the burden of California's energy production needs is unjust. We should be considering a more balanced portfolio of development alternatives that consider, invest in, and support scaled projects on the local level, and distributed generation in the built environment. These partnerships with cities, counties, and private enterprise build the very support needed to adopt this plan. Our lack of vision and creativity in diversifying how we produce renewable energy is troubling, especially as economies of scale improve for photovoltaic panels.

DRECP (in some alternatives) is focusing on development zones closer to desert communities with disturbed lands, and in areas determined to be of lower conflict. This is another positive step taken. Unfortunately, variance lands from the Solar PEIS process have migrated into the DRECP planning process. Their presence further complicates the alternatives, as more conservation driven alternatives, such as alternative 1 now include lands that could again harm national parks and connected lands. NPCA asks that variance lands be removed from consideration outside of DFAs. If variance lands are suitable for development, they should be DFAs, since reintroducing them in any other context returns us to a scattershot approach to renewable development and siting.

We agree that siting projects on already disturbed lands is preferable as it relates to protecting species, connectivity, and intact biological systems. We also recognize that first nations tribes have strong cultural connections to the desert in general, and to many locations known and unknown. Emphasizing development in Imperial or the West Mojave may reduce certain impacts, but could introduce others, especially related to social justice, cultural resources, and cumulative impacts to foraging habitat. We ask that consideration be given to communities and tribes to ensure that moving forward in these locations has us moving forward together and not in conflict with these communities and tribes .

We recommend the development of an environmentally preferred alternative that does not include, or severely limits, variance lands. This alternative should include DFA's as well as a higher distributed generation output (such as 25% rather than 10%). This alternative should reduce the total acreage (such as under 900,000 acres) and the estimated MW's needed to below 20,000 MW. This would provide a clear alternative to Alternative 5, which was produced by the energy industry.

We also recommend the removal or reduction of variance lands from Alternative 1. Specifically, lands identified by NPS as being high conflict variance as identified in their



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map developed for the Solar PEIS³. Lands identified include projects mentioned in this letter and the letter submitted on May 23, 2012.

We would like further explanation of the ACEC's proposed within this process. Similarly, we would like to participate in discussions about mitigation as stakeholders. To date, mitigation for tortoise has not been restricted to the designated recovery areas where projects have been built, although that criterion has been invoked to rule out locations. Significant, high quality lands, including grazing allotments, are available for mitigation purchase. Clarity on how and where we plan to mitigate could further inform how we best move forward in planning. Also, projects that have begun construction have not fulfilled their mitigation purchase obligations to date. Actions such as that do not further the public trust we are asked to enter with industry when public lands are used for energy projects.

Finally, several of the alternatives feature lands that conflict with sensitive desert tortoise habitat, and propose wind in areas important for migratory birds and golden eagles. These lands, especially public lands, should be eliminated from consideration.

We appreciate the continued opportunity to voice our concerns.

Respectfully,



David Lamfrom
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National Parks Conservation Association

³http://solareis.anl.gov/documents/fpeis/maps/NPS_Identified_Areas_of_High_Potential_for_Resource_Conflict_Regional.pdf

