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From: Erica Brand, The Nature Conservancy

Date: October 29, 2013

Subject: Comments to the Draft 2013 Integrated Energy Policy Report

Docket Number: 13-IEP-1A

California Energy Commission

**DOCKETED**

**13-IEP-1A**

**TN 72298**

**OCT 29 2013**

## 1. Introduction and Summary

The Nature Conservancy (“the Conservancy”) appreciates the opportunity to submit comments in response to the California Energy Commission’s draft 2013 Integrated Energy Policy Report (IEPR).

The mission of the Conservancy is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. To achieve that mission, the Conservancy strongly supports the emission reduction goals<sup>1</sup> and renewable energy mandates<sup>2</sup> established by the state of California to benefit Earth’s climate. We urge continued action to transition California to a low carbon energy system; however we feel strongly that this transition should be guided by a comprehensive planning process that has the objective of meeting multiple goals, including reliability, affordability, sustainability and protection of nature.

For these reasons, the Conservancy appreciates that the Commission has taken a leadership position on coordinated land-use and transmission planning. The Conservancy strongly supports landscape scale planning for energy generation and transmission development as the best path forward for California’s energy future. We appreciate the increased coordination between the Commission, the California Public Utilities Commission (CPUC) and the California Independent System Operator (CAISO) on this topic, and we strongly encourage this to continue. In addition, we urge the Commission to take action on landscape scale planning for energy generation and transmission within the Central Valley, before the completion of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP).

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<sup>1</sup> Global Warming Solutions Act of 2006 (AB 32).

<sup>2</sup> California’s 33 Percent by 2020 Renewables Portfolio Standard.

## **2. Prioritizing Preferred Resources for Nature**

The Conservancy supports a multi-pronged approach, both in technology and scale, to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and promoting a more sustainable energy future. However, we believe it's both possible and necessary to transition to a clean energy future in a manner that protects natural systems, habitats and species. Energy efficiency is a key strategy to meet the state's climate goals; it is also important because the energy we do not use has the least impact on our wild lands and waters and people and species that depend on them. We agree that energy efficiency and demand response should remain California's top priority for meeting the state's energy needs as population continues to grow and the economy recovers<sup>3</sup>.

The Conservancy strongly supports development of distributed renewable energy generation resources. Other than the energy we do not use, distributed renewable energy generation in the built environment, for example on rooftops and parking lots, has the least impact on our natural systems and should continue to be a strong priority for California. Distributed renewable energy generation proposed for areas outside of the built environment are sized to allow flexibility in siting to avoid areas with important conservation values. The Conservancy supports comprehensive planning for distributed generation resources to identify preferred locations for development, as discussed at the August 22 workshop. We urge the Commission to collaborate with key agencies and stakeholders to develop and implement a pilot planning process that achieves environmental, agricultural and business goals, while furthering responsible development of distributed local energy resources. A comprehensive planning process at the distribution level is important, because the key to ecologically sound small-scale and utility-scale facilities is not only size, but where they are sited, as discussed in the next section.

## **3. California's Energy Future: Coordinated Land-Use and Energy Planning**

The Conservancy appreciates the leadership role that the Commission has taken in championing integrated energy and land-use planning. We agree with the Commission that "the key to overcoming the synchronization challenge [between generation and transmission planning and permitting] is to develop a long-term transmission plan for preferred renewable generation zones."<sup>4</sup>

The best path forward for California is an energy future that uses landscape scale planning to *first* identify preferred areas of least-impact for development and then strategically plans

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<sup>3</sup> Draft Integrated Energy Policy Report, Pg. 9.

<sup>4</sup> Draft 2013 Integrated Energy Policy Report, Page 114.

transmission investments to these areas for timely development and delivery of renewable energy. This comprehensive approach will provide benefits to both people and nature.

Landscape scale planning allows for implementation of the mitigation hierarchy, which is the greatest opportunity for avoiding the adverse impacts of energy. Incorporating the mitigation hierarchy into the energy planning, ensures that: 1) facilities are first sited to *avoid* impacting natural systems; 2) technology choices and facility operating protocols are made to further *minimize* impacts; 3) *restoration* of impacts occurs when technically feasible, and 4) effective off-site conservation measures are undertaken to *mitigate* for (or offset) remaining impacts.

The Conservancy supports the recommendations related to In-State Coordinated Land-Use and Transmission Planning Efforts (pgs. 111-118). These actions will facilitate needed landscape scale planning for energy and strategically direct transmission investments to preferred development areas.

#### **4. Comprehensive Energy Planning: the DRECP and the Central Valley**

The draft IEPR notes two specific efforts to overcome the generation and transmission synchronization challenge – the DRECP and applying the DRECP model to the Central Valley.

The Nature Conservancy is a stakeholder to the DRECP and it is a good example of a coordinated landscape scale approach to energy generation and transmission planning. We remain committed to its successful completion.

Within the Central Valley, we support the Commission’s recommendation to apply a landscape scale planning approach to this region. The Nature Conservancy has been actively working on landscape scale planning within the Central Valley and has recently completed the *Western San Joaquin Valley Least Conflict Solar Energy Assessment*<sup>5</sup>. This is the first comprehensive scientific assessment to consider both biodiversity and agricultural conservation values in this region. The goal of the assessment is to identify areas with high conservation value important to avoid as well as areas of potential least conflict for solar energy generation. The Conservancy’s assessment has found significant acreage of potential least conflict and the results can be used to start a conversation around smart renewable energy generation and transmission development with the Central Valley.

We encourage the Commission to not wait until the DRECP is complete to participate in comprehensive renewable energy generation and transmission planning in the Central

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<sup>5</sup> Butterfield, H.S., D. Cameron, E. Brand, M. Webb, E. Forsburg, M. Kramer, E. O’Donoghue, and L. Crane. 2013. Western San Joaquin Valley least conflict solar assessment. Unpublished report. The Nature Conservancy, San Francisco, California. 27 pages.

Valley. For the reasons outlined within the draft IEPR, this is an important region with an urgent need for comprehensive energy planning to incentivize development of generation and transmission within preferred areas of least impact and to protect areas of important conservation and agricultural values.

**Recommendation:** To the discussion on the Westlands Solar Park (pg. 125) we recommend the following edit (in bold and underline):

“Supporters of using previously disturbed agricultural land that is no longer productive for development of renewable energy resources include the Defenders of Wildlife, and the Natural Resources Defense Council and The Nature Conservancy.”

Appendix A of this letter includes a comment letter submitted by The Nature Conservancy on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and Planned Transmission Corridors in Central California (April 2013).

**Recommendation:** We note a typo in the discussion of DRECP on page 115. The acreage for the DRECP is noted at 2.5 million acres. The number should be 22.5 million acres.

## **5. Hydraulic Fracturing**

**Recommendation:** To the discussion on hydraulic fracturing (pg. 161) we recommend the following edit (in bold and underline) to ensure consistency with Senate Bill 4 and reflect the potential for impacts on nature:

“Hydraulic fracturing used by the industry to unlock oil and natural gas from geologic formations such as shale has raised health and environmental concerns. The potential for groundwater contamination, the possibility of increased seismic activity, the diversion of fresh water used in hydraulic fracturing, the potential for impacts on wildlife, native plants, and habitat, including habitation fragmentation<sup>6</sup>, and the possibility of increased methane emissions have all pushed decision makers to reexamine policy related to the development of shale resources.”

## **6. The 2014 IEPR Update: Emphasis on Coordinated Land-Use and Energy Planning**

We urge the Commission to continue the discussion of coordinated land-use and energy planning in the 2014 Integrated Energy Policy Report Update proceeding. We recommend the Commission use its convening power to explore implementation of coordinated land-use and energy planning and the process and policy changes that will be required to ensure timely delivery of renewable energy. As one example, we support the recommendation

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<sup>6</sup> Senate Bill 4 (Section 2, 3160 (B)(4)).

that the energy agencies (Energy Commission, CPUC, and California ISO) evaluate the environmental weighting process and policies associated with the Long Term Procurement Plan (LTPP) and Transmission Planning Process (TPP) processes<sup>7</sup>.

## **7. Conclusion**

We appreciate the opportunity to have participated in two workshops in this IEPR proceeding, and the opportunity to follow-up with written comments. We strongly support the Commission's direction on coordinated land-use and energy planning and look forward to subsequent opportunities to discuss. If you have any questions, please contact me at (415) 281-0451 or via email at [ebrand@tnc.org](mailto:ebrand@tnc.org).

Respectfully submitted,



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CC: Stephanie Bailey via email at [stephanie.bailey@energy.ca.gov](mailto:stephanie.bailey@energy.ca.gov).

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<sup>7</sup> Draft 2013 Integrated Energy Policy Report, Appendix B, Page B-3.

## Memorandum

To: Kiti Buelna and Bert Verrips, Westlands Water District  
3130 N. Fresno Street, P.O. Box 6056. Fresno, CA 93703-6056

From: Laura Crane, The Nature Conservancy

Date: April 15, 2013

Subject: Comments on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) to prepare an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and Planned Transmission Corridors in Central California.

On behalf of The Nature Conservancy of California (the Conservancy), we are writing to provide comments on the Notice of Preparation (NOP) to prepare for an Environmental Impact Report (EIR) on the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and Planned Transmission Corridors in Central California.

The Nature Conservancy is a global, non-profit organization dedicated to the conservation of biodiversity. We seek to achieve our mission through science-based planning and implementation of conservation strategies that provide for the needs of people and nature. We strongly support the development of renewable sources of energy to mitigate the increasing threat of climate change. However, if not located, built, and operated responsibly, energy projects can negatively impact biodiversity, harm wildlife and their important habitats, and diminish water resources, especially in fragile desert environments. The Conservancy supports siting renewable energy facilities in locations where ecological impacts can be minimized, contained, or mitigated. Generally, these locations are close to economic centers and existing transmission lines, and do not displace productive agriculture and ranching operations.

We have been following the development of the Westlands Solar Park (WSP) and have found that the WSP is an example of a location that meets many, if not all of these criteria. The WSP is located on drainage-impaired farmland and, biological surveys conducted to date indicate that WSP is absent of special-status species with the exception of western burrowing owl. The solar operations would also use significantly less water than is currently used for the agricultural operations, thereby providing a more sustainable long-term land use.


The Conservancy encourages the continued development of the Westlands Solar Park Master Plan and Planned Transmission Corridors. We are supportive of the programmatic approach that is being taken to plan for both solar energy and transmission corridors. Furthermore, we encourage

the Westlands Water District (WWD) to consider broadening their approach and continue to programmatically plan for solar energy development on other WWD lands outside of the WSP.

We recognize that this Environmental Impact Report is for adoption of the WSP Master Plan and transmission corridors, and that the solar generating projects and transmission projects subsequently brought forward pursuant to the plan and adopted transmission alignments will be permitted by the respective public agencies that have jurisdiction. That said we feel it important to mention that future transmission projects within the Helm-Gregg transmission corridor should plan for and minimize impacts to the San Joaquin River and the Fresno Slough.

If you have any questions, please do not hesitate to contact me at (760) 399-7275 or [lcrane@tnc.org](mailto:lcrane@tnc.org).

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, appearing to read "Laura Crane", followed by a horizontal line.

Laura Crane  
The Nature Conservancy