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California Energy Commission

DOCKETED

09-RENEW EO-1

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California Energy Commission
Dockets Office, MS-4
Docket No. 09-RENEW EO-01
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

Re: DRECP NEPA/CEQA

To Whom It May Concern:

I support the Preferred Alternate of DRECP, with the changes which will be listed throughout this letter.

I am commenting on DRECP as a concerned citizen who spends many hours recreating in our California deserts, and has done so on a continuous basis since I moved to California in 1983. I camp and hike on California desert public land, far from the maddening crowds of the cities, where I can soak up the peace of the natural surroundings, study the native flora and fauna, and enjoy geological history. I collect rocks, minerals, invertebrate and plant fossils for my personal use, and to share – for free – with school children, scouts and seniors. I collect rough lapidary material in the California desert, disguised as dirt-encrusted rocks. By cutting and polishing this material, I turn it into gems that grace my personal jewelry and glossy specimens that sit ensconced on my desk and bookshelves, to remind me of the natural beauty of the desert.

On behalf of the San Diego Mineral and Gem Society and at my own expense, I have spent over 14 years visiting classrooms, scout meetings and senior centers in San Diego County to do geological “Rock Talk” presentations. I bring over 150 pounds of rock and mineral hand samples that I spread out on an 8-foot table. Everyone can pick them up, compare them and ask all the questions they want, before I explain about sedimentary, metamorphic and igneous rocks types; how to tell them apart; how they formed; how rocks are used in industry, road building, tools, cars, cups, plates, silverware, jewelry, cell phones, TVs and so forth. Many of these specimens – lava, pumice, granite, gabbro, granodiorite, gneiss, mica schist, phyllite, tourmaline, garnet, muscovite mica, calcite, biotite mica, petrified wood, geodes, chalcedony, gypsum, selenite, talc, fossil oyster shells, jasper, conglomerate, fossil coral, tuff, scoria and many more – I personally collected on public lands in the California desert. I create a free grab bag for every “Rock Talk” attendee, each of which includes small samples of sedimentary, metamorphic and igneous rocks; fossils; and minerals like calcite, pyrite and mica. Some rocks I purchase; many I collect on public lands in the California desert.

I have led field trips on behalf of the San Diego Mineral and Gem Society to well-known rock-collecting sites in the California desert. One particular trip I will never forget: mothers and children went on an overnight camp-out with me, and one young man made the find of the trip: a \$400 piece of fire agate rough. Everyone was able to experience for themselves the beauty and

grandeur of the desert, and to experience the thrill of discovery and collecting. And the young man? Charles Barckley? He went on to complete a Ph.D. in geology. Without trips to the desert, would our young people become as interested in geology? Gemology? Biology? Astrophysics? Mineralogy? Metallurgy? Cartography? Paleontology? Ornithology? Archaeology? Ecology? And the list goes on.

I ask that motorized vehicles continue to be allowed access to the California desert, because many of our rockhounds, including the very young, the disabled and seniors, are not able to walk the distance across the desert to some collecting areas and should not be locked out of this awesome place we all revere.

For all of the sites below, I ask that rockhounding areas and their motorized access routes become a part of the Special Recreation Management Area, and be protected from being listed in the Development Focus areas and taken out of National Conservation Lands and ACECs.

Rockhounds have already given up, for the good of other special interests, many rockhounding areas in the desert, beginning with the Desert Protection Act of the 1970s. We believed, at that time, that the Desert Protection Act would be the final decision on how the desert would be managed. This was not the case. Desert management was again evaluated in the 1980s-1990s, and as a result of the NECO, WECO and other plans, new wilderness areas were created that contained many prime rock collecting sites and many access roads were closed. Bottom line: The areas in which rockhounds could recreate were substantially decreased yet again. And access was made more difficult for the young, the disabled and seniors. Can you imagine driving up to the edge of a wilderness area, then hiking several miles carrying a pack laden with heavy hand tools, water and lunch, just to get to a rock collecting site that had been previously open to the public forever?

So, finally, this last time, I would like to have the voice of the rockhounds heard about those few rock collecting places that are left, and to ask that they be protected, just as other areas are protected. If this request isn't recognized, rockhounds will become extinct. Who will be left to make new discoveries? Who will bring rocks to school kids? And there will be an impact on those small towns throughout the desert that will lose revenue: no more food, gas, camping and motel money from those rockhounds.

I appreciate that the Bureau of Land Management, along with the CEC and other agencies, has issued the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, to attempt to identify areas where energy development in our deserts may be less harmful to plants, wildlife, scenery, recreation and other values. Areas that should not be developed will also be identified.

However, there are many special places in our deserts that the DRECP does not adequately protect from renewable energy development. Specifically, there are several rock collecting sites that are within Development Focus Areas, and some very special collecting places that are not within Special Recreation Management Areas, but that should be.

Afton Canyon

Afton Canyon is located off I-15 at the Afton Turnoff, about 32 miles east of Barstow and 25 miles west of Baker. This has long been a rockhound area, with many types of agate, sagenite, jasper, opalite, calcite, fluorite and many other rocks and minerals available for the collector. Field trips have been led to this area by many southern California rock clubs, as well as the CFMS. We ask that this area, along with the roads and trails to and through it, be considered for Special Recreation Management Area.

Blythe

The Blythe collecting area is located at T4S, R20E (Blythe DAG). It is north of the Palen McCoy Wilderness and south of the Little Maria Mountains. A Development Focus Area (DFA) appears to cover at least a portion of this psilomelane (manganese) collecting area. I ask the BLM to redefine or redraw the DFA so that it does not cover this area, with at least a 1,000-foot radius around it that includes any designated routes that allow access to this collecting area. I have personally visited the Arlington mine site and enjoyed the thrill of collecting powder-coated black manganese specimens on several occasions.

Boron

The Boron collecting area is located between Saddleback Mountain and California City Boulevard, north of Highway 58 and south of Twenty Mule Team Parkway (Cuddeback Lake DAG). This collecting area, which contains petrified wood, chapenite, jasper and agate, is within a DFA. I ask the BLM to redefine the DFA so that it does not cover the Boron collecting area, with at least a 1,000-foot radius buffer around it that includes any designated routes that allow access to this collecting area.

Brown Butte (aka Lonely Butte)

The Brown Butte collecting area is located at T10N, R11W, Sections 2, 3, 10 & 11 (Lancaster DAG). This collecting area, which is good for petrified reeds, agate, jasper, and jasp-agate, is within a DFA. I ask the BLM to redefine the DFA so that it does not cover this area, with at least a 1,000-foot radius buffer around it that includes any designated routes that allow access to this collecting area.

Chambless

The Chambless fossil collecting site is adjacent to the Trilobite Wilderness/Marble Mountain area. It is off the National Trails Highway, about 2 miles west of Amboy. The current roads to the collecting sites are outside the Wilderness and are used as a staging area to walk into the collecting sites. We ask that the roads in this area be left open so we can access the fossil sites.

Cinco

The Cinco collecting area is located at T31S, R11W, south/southwest of Jawbone Station (Tehachapi DAG). A DFA appears to cover some or all of this collecting area for quartz and feldspar crystals. I ask the BLM to redefine the DFA so that it does not cover this area, with at least a 1,000-foot radius buffer around it that includes any designated routes that allow access to this collecting area.

Gem Hill

The Gem Hill collecting area is located at T10N, R13W, Sections 26, 27, 34, and 35 (Lancaster DAG). This collecting area, which is good for agate, jasper, rhyolite, common opal, and petrified wood, is within a DFA. I ask the BLM to refine the DFA so that it does not cover this area, and at least a 1,000 foot radius around it, and any designated routes that allow access to this collecting area.

Hector Hills

There is a very small DFA near this collecting area, located at T8N, R5E, Sections 4, 5, 6, 15,

16, 21 and 22 (Newberry Springs DAG). This DFA is only a problem if it would block or deny access to Pisgah Crater Road. If it would, I ask that it be redefined so that it does not deny access.

Hauser Beds

The Hauser Beds collecting area is located at T 8 ½ S, R 19 E, Sections 1, 2, 4, 6, 8, 10, 11, 12, 14, 18, 20, 21, 22, 24, 26, and 28; T 8 ½ S, R 19 E, Section 16; T 8 ½ S, R 20 E, Sections 6, 7, and 18 (Trigo DAG). Not only is this area one of the best collecting areas in our deserts, it is covered by a Memorandum of Understanding between the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the California Federation of Mineralogical Societies, Inc. The MOU was signed on February 22, 2000, and has never been terminated by either party. The MOU recognizes the importance of the Hauser Geode Beds area as a major recreation area for dispersed rockhounding recreation. It appears as though the Mule Mountain LTVA SRMA partially covers this collecting area. I ask the BLM to expand this SRMA to fully include the entire Hauser Beds area, as described above. I also ask the BLM to acknowledge the MOU at the District and State Office levels and expressly state in the SRMA that this MOU shall continue. I have personally collected geodes, agate and jasper at this location. I have led field trips to this location. Small geodes from this site have been given away to the public, for free, during the annual December Nights / Christmas on the Prado celebration. Free cutting is included. I have used small geodes from this location in free grab bags for school talks. Geodes as large as a basketball are still being recovered from this area. I would also hope that access to the nearby associated collecting areas would also be preserved, including Potato Patch, etc.

Kramer Junction

I understand that certain groups are lobbying to have certain DFAs “relocated” to the Kramer Junction area (Victorville DAG). I am opposed to any DFA being placed on the southeast corner of Kramer Junction (south of Highway 58 and east of Highway 395), as this is a collecting area for dendritic agate, common opal, and obsidian. A portion of this area may be under claim by one or more local rockhound clubs. Field trips led by local clubs visit the site at least annually.

Lavic and Jasper Hill

The Lavic and Jasper Hill collecting areas located at T8N, R5E, Sections 13, 14, 15, 22, 23, 24, 25, 26, 27, 34, 35, 36 and T8N, R6E, Sections 18, 19, 20, 30, 29, 31, 32, and T9N, R4E, Sections 29, 30, 31, and 32 (Newberry Springs DAG). These jasper collecting areas are located within the Route 66 viewshed, between Ludlow and Newberry Springs. I appreciate that the BLM is proposing the National Trails Viewshed SRMA, which protects various recreational activities along Route 66. I especially appreciate the fact that the BLM has specifically recognized the importance of collecting in the Trilobite and Ship Mountains, and has created a Recreation Management Zone to protect collecting in those areas. However, this SRMA does encompass some very special collecting places along Route 66. I ask the BLM to increase the size of the National Trails Viewshed SRMA, so that it includes the Lavic and Jasper Hill collecting areas, and specifically allows collecting in these areas.

Newbury

The Newbury collecting area is located at T8N, R3E (Newbury Springs DAG). It is north of Newberry Mountains Wilderness and south of Route 66. A DFA appears to cover and/or surround this collecting area for nodules and agate. I ask the BLM to redraw the DFA boundary so that it does not cover this area, with at least a 1,000-foot radius around it, and any designated

routes that allow access to this collecting area.

Sperry Wash

The Sperry Wash collecting area is located in the Dublin Hills, west of Shoshone (Owlshead DAG). Given this area's close proximity to the Amargosa River Valley/Grimshaw SRMA, and given that rock collecting is a legitimate use within this SRMA, I ask that this SRMA be expanded to include the Sperry Wash collecting area, protecting this important recreational activity. I have personally driven down the whole length of Sperry Wash and collected the petrified palm wood for which it is known, as well as other rocks and minerals.

Stoddard Well

The Stoddard Well collecting area is located at T11N to the 15 Freeway, R1W to R3W, up to the southern boundary of Stoddard OHV Area (Victorville DAG). The area includes Black Mountain and Sidewinder Mountain. A DFA appears to cover or come very close to this marble collecting area. This area is frequented by rockhounds and I ask the BLM to recognize this area as a new Special Recreation Management Area (SRMA) under the DRECP. This should protect the important rock collecting recreational activity that takes place here. If the BLM is unwilling to create a new SRMA, I ask that this DFA be redefined so that it does not cover this area and any designated routes that allow access to this collecting area. I have personally visited this area and collected verde antique and tri-colored marble.

Yermo

The Yermo collecting area is located at T10N to T11N, R1E to R2E (Newberry Springs DAG), in the Calico Mountains between the two Superior Cronese ACECs. The collecting area overlaps approximately six sections of the western edge of the eastern Superior Cronese ACEC. A DFA appears to cover some of this excellent collecting area, where we collect agate, petrified palm root, jasper, and chert. I ask the BLM to recognize this area that is frequented by rockhounds as a new SRMA under the DRECP, and to protect the important rock collecting activities in this area. If the BLM is unwilling to create a new Special Recreation Management Area, I ask that the Superior/Rainbow SRMA be expanded to include this area, and to specify that rock collecting is an allowable use in this area. Alternatively, I ask that this DFA be redefined so that it does not cover this area and any designated routes that allow access to this collecting area.

Yuha Basin

The south side of I-8 between Highway 98 and Dunaway Road has large, 8" long fossilized oyster shells that have been collected by rockhounds since the 1950s. Also collected in this area are fossil barnacles, fossil coral, fossil starfish, selenite, gypsum and other minerals, as well as petrified wood. We ask that this area be considered under SRMA. It is currently listed under overlapping ACEC and NLC lands. We ask that rockhounding be continued and all roads into the area be left open. I have attended many of the annual San Diego Mineral and Gem Society field trips to this area, and personally collected fossil oysters, fossil coral, petrified wood, selenite and gypsum. I use a fossil oyster from this area in my presentations to school kids, scouts and seniors. It has been handled by thousands of enthusiastic young people, and they never fail to marvel that the shell from such a large ocean-dwelling creature is now found in the middle of the desert.

I would like to add: In establishing the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) within the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 Congress found that:

"The California desert contains historical, scenic, archeological, environmental, biological, cultural, scientific, educational, recreational, and economic resources that are uniquely located adjacent to an area of large population."

I would like to request that 'recreation' be added to the array of values to be emphasized in future travel management planning.

If recreation is not added to this language in the Final EIR/EIS, it will go contrary to the agency assurance to recreation stakeholders that designated motorized routes would not be closed by DRECP.

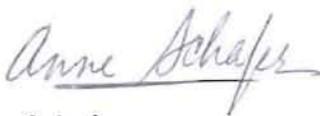
Because of the 'more restrictive shall apply' clause regarding NLCA CMAs, the protections for recreational routes of travel in this SRMAs mean nothing.

I support plans to increase lands managed for recreational emphasis and exclude them from renewable energy development through designation of Special and Extended Recreational Management Areas. We ask that these proposed designations from the Preferred Alternative be carried over to the Final EIR/EIS.

I do not support any additional land for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) or National Conservation Land (NCL) designations. The Bureau of Land Management must carefully consider whether land qualifies for the above designations because of significant criteria of relevance or importance. We believe the hard work exhibited in the Draft DRECP document show that in-depth investigation has been undertaken to find those special areas that warrant increased protection. In our careful examination we do not find any other or additional areas that warrant inclusion to ACEC or NCL designations.

Thank you for your time and interest in the future of rockhounds in the desert.

Sincerely,



Anne Schafer

- Past President, San Diego Mineral & Gem Society
- Coordinator, Gems & Minerals Exhibit, San Diego County Fair
- Retired Radar Cross-section Analysis & Test Engineer / Project Manager at Global Analytics, Alcoa Defense Systems, MacDonnell-Douglas Aircraft Company and SAIC, San Diego County.
- Former meteorological research associate and manager of a scientific computing center, Dept. of Physics & Atmospheric Science, Drexel University, Philadelphia, PA