Media Guide to the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP)

September 2016

What is the DRECP?

DRECP Plan Area

The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) represents a landmark collaboration between the state of California, the federal government and many other stakeholders. The plan identifies lower conflict lands for renewable energy development and high value lands for conservation in the California desert. The DRECP is a key pathway for California and the federal government to meet renewable energy goals while protecting important public lands as directed by Congress.

Originally conceived in 2008, a draft DRECP was formally released for public input in 2011. After dozens of public meetings, more than 14,000 comments and three different drafts, the first phase of the DRECP is now finalized and will move to its implementation phase. While this plan addresses public lands, the second phase of the DRECP focuses on renewable energy development on private lands at the county level. Overall the DRECP focuses on meeting ambitious clean energy goals while protecting important natural landscapes, home to diverse wildlife including bighorn sheep, golden eagles and threatened desert tortoises.

Background

The California desert, stretching 350 miles from the Owens Valley to El Centro, encompasses one of the largest intact desert landscapes remaining in the U.S. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) administers the majority of public lands here. These public lands have long been cherished for the recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat and watershed protection they provide to communities and visitors alike. In 1976, these public lands were designated by Congress as the **California Desert Conservation Area** to promote protection of its "historic, scenic, archeological, environmental, biological, cultural, scientific, educational, recreational, and economic resources." The area also has significant renewable energy resource potential including solar, wind and geothermal.

> Los Angeles Times
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> "…this will be a strong blueprint for the future, protecting the desert's most pristine and environmentally significant land while making good use of perhaps its best natural resource — abundant sun for solar energy."
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> - Los Angeles Times Editorial
> November 2015

In 2008, state and federal agencies began identifying areas for renewable energy development and for conservation. In the process, they invited a diverse group of stakeholders and local governments to help guide their work. In September 2014, the agencies released a draft plan for public review that covered 22 million acres of public and non-federal land of the California desert. As the federal plan proceeded somewhat more rapidly than individual county renewable energy plans, the agencies moved to a phased approach.

The DRECP will serve as a guide for California, the federal government and all parties invested in combatting climate change to meet ambitious and necessary greenhouse gas emission reduction goals while protecting important public lands. This plan identifies more than 600 square miles of "lower conflict" areas for potential renewable energy development. The DRECP also permanently protects many important habitats within the desert, in part to mitigate for impacts from energy development, and in part to follow Congress's direction on the protection of important California desert areas as National Conservation Lands.[1] This first phase of the DRECP will ensure that California's diverse plant and wildlife will thrive in the face of climate change and that future generations will enjoy desert lands for years to come.

[1] http://desertlands.org/

DRECP Facts

- The **DRECP is eight years in the making.** The proposed plan is the result of dozens of public meetings, assessment of hundreds of datasets, and tens of thousands of public comments – all in the name of meeting ambitious clean energy goals while strengthening California's conservation legacy.

- More than **14,000 unique comments** were received from the public and other stakeholders.

- **The final version of Phase I of the DRECP affects 10.9 million acres** of publicly owned land in the California desert, or almost 17,000 square miles. This is roughly equivalent to the states of New Hampshire and Massachusetts combined.

- **More than 600 square miles (388,000 acres) are identified as Development Focus Areas (DFA) – lands that provide the least conflict with public land values.** This represents an area 20 percent larger than Los Angeles, California. **For reference, if half of this area were developed for solar energy production, it could produce approximately 27,000 MW, or three times the amount of solar energy produced on all federal lands to date.**[2]

- The California Energy Commission has found that the **DRECP's DFAs provide enough land to help California meet its interim clean energy goal of 50 percent reduction in greenhouse gases by 2030 and 80 percent reduction by 2050 and beyond.**

- **The DRECP strengthens land protections within the California Desert Conservation Area by permanently protecting 3.9 million acres as National Conservation Lands. Additionally, the BLM reauthorizes or expands protections for Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.** This matrix of conservation lands will protect important cultural areas and habitat areas for desert tortoise, bighorn sheep and other desert wildlife, while providing for recreational and scenic opportunities for many generations.

- **The first phase of the DRECP identifies areas for potential renewable energy development on public land.** In the next phase of the DRECP, federal and state agencies will be working with desert counties to identify degraded and disturbed private lands for renewable energy development and areas for future conservation. **Thus far, with funding support from the California Energy Commission, three counties have already identified 326,750 acres for renewable energy development on non-federal lands.**[3] The other three counties are currently undergoing planning efforts.

- The California desert has a role to play in carbon sequestration – another critical strategy to meet emission reduction goals. **Recent studies have found that the California desert stores enormous amounts of carbon buried as caliche, or calcium carbonate, in the soil. Disturbance of the fragile desert soil releases a significant amount of carbon into the atmosphere.**[4] The California Air Resources Board, charged with implementing California's cap and trade program, has identified conservation of desert lands as a part of the state's effort to sequester – or store – carbon.

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[2] A theoretical scenario using average acres/MW used by the CEC and BLM. See Volume I Chapter 3 of the DRECP Draft Environmental Impact Statement, pg. 3-52.

[3] Inyo County: http://www.inyoplanning.org/projects/documents/Exhibit1CEQAFindings.pdf See Table 1. LA County: http://file.lacounty.gov/bos/supdocs/95462.pdf. Imperial County: ftp://ftp.co.imperial.ca.us/icpds/eir/cec/final/22Revisions.pdf

[4] Allen, M.F., et al (2013). *Carbon Balance in California Deserts: Impacts of widespread Solar Power Generation.* Center for Conservation Biology, University of California, Riverside. http://www.energy.ca.gov/2014publications/CEC-500-2014-063/CEC-500020140 63.pdf

What have stakeholders said about the DRECP?

The Desert Sun
DESERTSUN.COM

"The fact is that we need the DRECP, both for strengthening our commitment to solving the climate crisis as well as adding to our rich legacy of protected public lands. This plan is a compromise after six years of negotiations and input – and that's exactly why it strikes an acceptable balance.

- *Frazier Haney, Conservation Director, Mojave Desert Land Trust*

August 9, 2016

THE PRESS-ENTERPRISE

"California and the Interior Department deserve our praise for this careful, collaborative planning effort that will guide us toward a balanced and integrated renewable resource portfolio helping us build our low-carbon, clean-energy future with the lowest possible impacts."

- *V. John White, Executive Director, Center for Energy Efficiency and Renewable Technologies & Johanna Wald, former Lands Program Director for the Natural Resources Defense Council*

August 13, 2016

THE HILL

"The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan will stand as a cornerstone to California's energy independence, facilitating clean, renewable energy production while conserving large stretches of pristine and vulnerable desert lands."

- *Jamie Williams, President, The Wilderness Society & Nancy Pfund, Founder and Managing Partner of DBL Partners, an early investor in Tesla Motors and SolarCity*

July 11, 2016

CAPITOL WEEKLY
COVERING CALIFORNIA GOVERNMENT AND POLITICS

"With the DRECP finished, the Golden State will be one step closer to a clean energy future and a legacy of stunning open lands for future generations"

- *Daniel Jacobson, State Director, Environment California*

June 13, 2016

Experts Available for Interview

Wildlife

Kim Delfino, California Program Director,
Defenders of Wildlife
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Garry George, Renewable Energy Director,
Audubon California
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Public Lands

Matt Skroch, Officer, The Pew Charitable Trusts
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California Wilderness Coalition
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Dan Smuts, Senior Director, Pacific Region,
The Wilderness Society
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Energy

Erica Brand, California Energy Program Director,
The Nature Conservancy
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Barbara Boyle, Senior Campaign Representative, Sierra Club
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Helen O'Shea, Director, Western Renewable Energy Project,
Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC)
415-875-6159 - hoshea@nrdc.org

Desert Conservation Lands

Danielle Murray, Senior Director of Programs, Conservation Lands Foundation
970-247-0807 x102 - danielle@conservationlands.org

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Patrick Donnelly, Policy Director, Amargosa Conservancy
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The Desert Sun
DESERTSUN.COM

"[Southern California] Edison's president, Ron Nichols, said in an emailed statement that the utility is "proud to have had the opportunity to actively participate in the [DRECP] effort." Diane Ross-Leech, PG&E's director of environmental policy, also provided an emailed statement, saying the Northern California utility is "committed to protecting California's unique ecosystems and landscapes, and continuing to advance low-carbon energy solutions to combat climate change."

July 29, 2016