

**SUBMITTAL TO THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS
COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE, STATE OF CALIFORNIA**



FROM: Supervisor John J. Benoit

SUBMITTAL DATE:

July 7, 2016

SUBJECT: County Letter Regarding the Areas of Critical Environmental Concern and Conservation Management Actions proposed in the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment

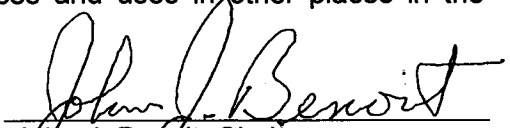
RECOMMENDED MOTION: That the Board of Supervisors approve and authorize the Chairman to submit a letter to the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) Program Manager and the Secretary of the Interior joining, in part, in the comments made by the Large-scale Solar Association on the Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) and the Conservation and Management Actions (CMAs) proposed in the DRECP Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA).

BACKGROUND:

Summary

The DRECP is a collaborative planning effort by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), California Energy Commission, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and California Department of Fish and Wildlife that recognizes the desert's diverse values. The DRECP's goal is to facilitate renewable energy development in appropriate places in the desert while conserving other resources and uses in other places in the desert.

(continued on page 2)


John J. Benoit, Chairman
Fourth District Supervisor

FINANCIAL DATA	Current Fiscal Year:	Next Fiscal Year:	Total Cost:	Ongoing Cost:	POLICY/CONSENT (per Exec. Office)
COST	\$	\$	\$	\$	Consent <input type="checkbox"/> Policy <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
NET COUNTY COST	\$	\$	\$	\$	

SOURCE OF FUNDS:

Budget Adjustment:

For Fiscal Year:

C.E.O. RECOMMENDATION:

County Executive Office Signature

MINUTES OF THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS

- ☐ A-30 ☐ Positions Added
☐ 4/5 Vote ☐ Change Order

Prev. Agn. Ref.:

District: 4

Agenda Number:

3-62

BACKGROUND:

Summary (continued)

The County has actively participated in the preparation of the DRECP, providing input to ensure the DRECP would not unfairly burden private lands nor impede the County's own land use authority over private lands under the County's jurisdiction. In March 2015, the DRECP partner agencies announced a phased approach to completing the DRECP. As part of the approach, the BLM component of the DRECP is now being finalized first in Phase I, making designations for conservation and renewable energy on BLM public lands through a Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) and Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). The Proposed LUPA would amend the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan that includes Eastern Riverside County.

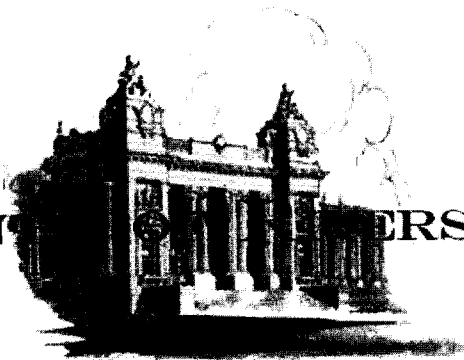
It has recently come to my attention that the Conservation Management Actions (CMAs) proposed in the DRECP may hinder development on renewable energy in the Development Focus Areas identified in the plan. Development Focus Areas are BLM lands identified in the DRECP that are to be available for solar, wind and geothermal development. However, rather than streamlining renewable energy project permits in the Development Focus Areas, which is a goal of the DRECP, the CMAs appear to place greater restrictions on renewable energy development than currently exist. While the County respects BLM's land use jurisdiction over its own lands, I am concerned that if renewable energy projects cannot viably be permitted on BLM lands, the County and its residents will disproportionately bear the burden of development of such projects on large swaths of private lands which would foreclose other development opportunities for those private lands. Or, alternatively, large-scale renewable energy projects will not be built in eastern Riverside County, which would lose out on job opportunities and suffer other economic impacts. It's important to note that eastern Riverside County provides prime opportunities for renewable energy development in California, where 50 percent of the state's electricity must come from renewable energy sources by 2030.

The County supports renewable energy production in an environmentally and fiscally responsible manner. Moreover, the County wants to contribute its fair share to meet renewable energy goals. That said, such renewable energy goals can only best be achieved when renewable energy development and conservation occur on both public and private lands in a balanced manner.

Impact on Residents and Businesses

Developing renewable energy resources continues to be an important issue across the state. The DRECP needs to provide more certainty in its Plan to ensure that a proper balance is achieved to provide both renewable energy opportunities and environmental protections.

COUNTY OF RIVERSIDE



Board of Supervisors

District 1	Kevin Jeffries 951-955-1010
District 2	John F. Tavaglione 951-955-1020
District 3	Chuck Washington 951-955-1030
District 4	John J. Benoit 951-955-1040
District 5	Marion Ashley 951-955-1050

July 12, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary of Interior
U.S. Department of Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Re: Concern Regarding the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment

Dear Secretary Jewell:

The purpose of this letter is to express concerns that Riverside County has regarding the possible adoption of the Proposed Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) related to the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan ("Plan"). The Proposed LUPA would amend the California Desert Conservation Area Plan that includes Eastern Riverside County.

Riverside County has been actively involved in the evolution of the Plan. However, we do not believe some of the important concerns raised have been addressed in the Plan, including the need for permit streamlining and ensuring the Plan will not inhibit or impede land exchanges or swaps relative to planned Salton Sea revitalization and restoration.

We are also concerned that adoption of the preferred alternative in the Plan will chill, if not thwart, altogether, additional renewable energy development on federally managed lands in Riverside County. It has recently come to our attention that the Conservation Management Actions proposed in the Plan may hinder development on renewable energy in the Development Focus Areas identified in the Plan. Specifically, the County shares the following concerns previously raised by the renewables industry:

- The Plan burdens those lands which have been identified for possible development - Development Focus Areas ("DFAs") - with Conservation Management Actions ("CMAs"), not applicable to development in Riverside County today. Many of these CMAs appear to serve little purpose explained in the Plan, but would add substantial, and potentially prohibitive, costs to development on public lands in Riverside County. We understand that the solar industry has identified the most onerous of these CMAs and requested that they be modified or eliminated altogether.
- The Plan has not achieved its stated purpose of streamlining environmental review for projects sited in DFAs. It is particularly troubling that, rather than streamlining project permits in DFAs, the Plan appears to place greater restrictions on development than currently exists today. The BLM acknowledged this in a Desert Sun article published July 3, 2016.

While the County respects BLM's land use jurisdiction over its managed lands, we are concerned that if renewable energy projects cannot viably be permitted on federally managed lands, Riverside County and its residents will disproportionately bear the burden of development of such projects on large swaths of private lands which would foreclose other development opportunities for those private lands. Or, alternatively, large-scale renewable energy projects will not be built in Eastern Riverside County which would have lost job opportunities and other economic impacts for the County and its residents.

Riverside County is home to thousands of megawatts of renewable energy and wants to contribute its fair share to meet renewable energy goals. Solar and other renewable energy development on public lands in Riverside County has been vital to the economic recovery of the County over the last decade, and remains, in our view, a critical component of the County's economic well-being going forward. Riverside County believes renewable energy goals can only best be achieved when renewable energy development and conservation occur in on both public and private lands in a balanced manner.

Riverside County understands that the solar industry has most recently expressed its concerns and recommended a number of revisions to the Plan to address these concerns in a letter to you dated January 7, 2016 and in a letter dated May 9, 2016 to the DRECP Program Manager in Sacramento. Riverside County supports the revisions that relate to the application of CMAs in the DFAs and trusts that you will as well.

Thank you for your attention to this matter. I will make myself and County staff available for a conversation at your convenience.

Sincerely,

John J. Benoit, Chairman
Riverside County Board of Supervisors

cc: Janice Schneider, Department of Interior
Neil Kornze, Director, Bureau of Land Management
Jerry Perez, CA State Director BLM
Vicki Campbell, DRECP Program Manager