
SOLAR ENERGY DEVELOPMENT
SUPPLEMENT TO THE
PROGRAMMATIC ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT
(PEIS)
PUBLIC MEETING*

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Palm Desert, California

* This transcript has been modified by Argonne National Laboratory to correct any obvious grammatical and transcription errors.

A P P E A R A N C E S

HOLLY ROBERTS

Bureau of Land Management

SHANNON STEWART

Bureau of Land Management

CAROLINE MANN

U.S. Department of Energy

HEIDI HARTMANN

Argonne National Laboratory

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1 P R O C E E D I N G S

2 MS. HARTMANN: The first speaker signed up is
3 Elizabeth Cross. Is Elizabeth here?

4 Okay. And I apologize if I mispronounce any
5 last names. Stephanie Dashiell?

6 MS. DASHIELL: Dashiell.

7 MS. MANN: Could I give you guys a reminder,
8 too, please? We have this lovely lady in the corner
9 who is our court reporter. If you were here at our
10 last meeting, it was very difficult for our previous
11 reporter to capture what the audience was saying if
12 there's any background information. So speak clearly
13 and slowly because she doesn't want to miss a word.

14 MS. HARTMANN: Yes. And say your name. That
15 helps, too.

16 MS. DASHIELL: My name is Stephanie Dashiell,
17 and I'm here representing Defenders of Wildlife as
18 their California Desert representative.

19 I just want to thank BLM for holding this and
20 for the opportunity to provide public input on the
21 Supplement to the Draft Solar PEIS.

22 The Supplement to the Draft Solar PEIS is an
23 important step in meeting both the renewal energy
24 policy goals and protecting our natural and biological
25 resources. Specifically, the Supplement has correctly

1 removed the two high-conflict zones in California, both
2 Iron Mountain and Pisgah.

3 While we support the BLM effort, there remain
4 opportunities to strengthen the proposed program to
5 ensure that wildlife and natural resources are
6 protected and that siting is smart from the start.

7 First of all, BLM must work to ensure that
8 solar energy development, both in and out of the solar
9 energy zones, is consistent with BLM's wildlife policy
10 and that effective mitigation measures are adopted and
11 adequately enforced.

12 BLM should exclude from all future
13 development the areas deemed unsuitable as solar energy
14 zones because of wildlife and resource conflicts,
15 including the Pisgah zone, not just the Iron Mountain
16 zone.

17 In the case of California, both Iron Mountain
18 and Pisgah should be excluded from the solar energy
19 development to prevent further degradation and habitat
20 fragmentation by piecemeal solar development authorized
21 through the variance process.

22 The Supplement correctly reduces the
23 Riverside East Solar Energy Zone by approximately
24 43,000 acres. However, the proposed area still contains
25 important habitat, such as microphyll woodlands and

1 numerous washes.

2 Siting lands outside of solar energy zones
3 through the variance process should take into
4 consideration species habitat and habitat linkages for
5 endangered species, such as bighorn sheep, desert
6 tortoise, among others.

7 Under the variance process, there remains, as
8 mentioned previously, 20 million acres of land outside
9 of the zones, 1.3 acres in California, which are still
10 open to solar development.

11 While incentives exist to guide development
12 to the zones predetermined, further efforts should be
13 made to guide development to degraded land, such as
14 brownfields and old mining sites, which are not
15 currently included in the solar energy zones, and away
16 from sensitive desert lands.

17 Lastly, BLM should exclude more land from
18 consideration under the variance process, specifically
19 lands designated under the California Desert
20 Conservation Act as wildlife habit management areas,
21 lands with unique plant assemblages, and limited
22 multiple use areas should be excluded.

23 Thank you for this opportunity to express our
24 concerns and opinions on the BLM solar energy program.
25 I'll conclude there.

1 MS. HARTMANN: Thank you, Stephanie.

2 Next we have Joan Taylor. Is Joan here?

3 PARTICIPANT: She couldn't make it.

4 MS. HARTMANN: Oh. Then Paul Smith?

5 MR. SMITH: I'm here, but I wasn't scheduled
6 to talk. It was another Paul Smith.

7 MS. HARTMANN: Must be. Okay. Victoria
8 Fuller.

9 MS. FULLER: I submitted mine online.

10 MS. HARTMANN: Oh, thank you, Victoria.

11 Seth Shteir. And is Brendan Hughes here?

12 Okay. You'll be next then.

13 MR. SHTEIR: Good evening. My name is Seth
14 Shteir, and I'm representing National Parks
15 Conservation Association tonight.

16 The mission of my organization is simple.
17 It's to protect and enhance America's national parks
18 for present and future generations.

19 I'd like to thank both the Bureau of Land
20 Management and the Department of Energy for the
21 opportunity to make comments about the Solar PEIS
22 Supplement.

23 I'd like to make the following points
24 regarding the new Supplement. It's very important to
25 invest in a renewable energy future to help buffer us

1 from climate change and to help us to become an energy
2 independent nation, but we must do so in a way that does
3 not jeopardize our national parks, wilderness, and
4 other ecologically sensitive lands.

5 The best sites for renewable energy
6 development are on disturbed lands and brownfields,
7 not on areas that are wildlife corridors, support rare
8 native plants and animals, house significant cultural
9 or historical resources, or have significant
10 recreational values.

11 While the California Desert may be an
12 attractive place to site renewable energy development
13 from a developer's point of view, we shouldn't be asked
14 to share a disproportionate burden for the rest of the
15 country.

16 Here's some positive aspects I think of the
17 new Solar PEIS Supplement. One is the elimination of
18 the 106,000-acre Iron Mountain Solar Energy Zone to the
19 northeast of Joshua Tree National Park. That's
20 definitely a step in the right direction in protecting
21 environmentally sensitive lands and making renewable
22 energy truly smart from the start.

23 Another positive development is the reduction
24 and reconfiguration of the Riverside East Solar Energy
25 Zone by approximately 43,000 acres. What that's done

1 is it's pushed the boundary of the SEZ away from
2 sensitive lands in Joshua Tree National Park's eastern
3 boundary and will ultimately help reduce the impact on
4 national park resources.

5 Additionally, through visual mitigation
6 mentioned in the Solar PEIS Supplement, the technologies
7 limit their size and contrast, and will also help protect
8 Joshua Tree National Park's visual resources.

9 An additional positive aspect of this
10 particular document is the designation of 11,000 acres
11 of a non-development area within the Riverside East
12 Solar Energy Zone of intermittent lakes, major washes,
13 and other sensitive areas. This will help protect
14 plant and animal species.

15 The surveys mentioned in the Solar PEIS
16 Supplement will help to identify and map desert dry
17 wash woodland, ironwood forests, riparian habitat, sand
18 dunes, sensitive plants, wildlife corridors, and all
19 that's a really great start. But it's not enough.
20 From there, the process should be open to protecting
21 additional land within the Riverside East SEZ if the
22 surveys indicate sensitive plants, animals, and
23 habitat.

24 One other positive development I'd like to
25 applaud is the exclusion of all proposed California

1 Desert Protection Act of 2011 lands from consideration.
2 This protects park additions for all three California
3 desert parks over 70,000 acres. And it really makes
4 the case that these lands are recognized for their
5 nationally significant values and supports their case
6 for park addition.

7 One criticism of this particular document is
8 the preferred alternative. The preferred alternative
9 for the Solar PEIS Supplemental focuses renewable energy
10 development in solar energy zones, but it also
11 establishes variance processes which would open up an
12 additional 20 million acres to solar development.

13 The problem with that is that the variance
14 process is really incongruous with the establishment
15 and idea behind solar energy zones.

16 There's been considerable time, effort, and
17 energy placed into identifying, reconfiguring, and
18 identifying low-conflict solar energy zone areas, and
19 solar energy zones should really be the place for solar
20 energy development.

21 So development in the solar energy zones
22 exclusively protects other important resources that I'm
23 sure the BLM wants to protect, such as wildlife, scenic
24 viewsheds, water resources, air quality, and, of course,
25 recreational opportunities.

1 So I thank you tonight on behalf of the National
2 Parks Conservation Association for being able to make
3 these comments. Thank you very much.

4 MS. HARTMANN: So we've got Brendan Hughes,
5 and after Brendan will be Adam Eventov.

6 MR. HUGHES: Hi. Name is Brendan Hughes. I
7 kind of have a scattershot of comments, so hopefully
8 they are not too all over the place.

9 But I just wanted to say a few things about
10 the program PEIS, the Supplement. Earlier it was said
11 that you were going to -- you want to have a process
12 for establishing new zones, zones with low resource
13 conflict, and I was just wondering, what does that
14 constitute exactly?

15 I think there needs to be a lot of thought
16 put into what is low resource conflict because Ivanpah
17 I always thought of as low resource
18 conflict, and it's been sort of disastrous in terms of
19 the desert tortoise. That project threatens the
20 viability of a whole unit of desert tortoise
21 population.

22 So if we're going to have more disasters like
23 that, then I think we should think long and hard about
24 low resource conflict zones.

25 The variance process is -- I'm totally

1 opposed to it, and I think most desert dwellers are.
2 I'm from Joshua Tree, and although a lot of those
3 variance zones won't necessarily be right in my town,
4 they will be in areas that I deem to be very important
5 for recreation, for habitat, for desert dwellers, and
6 people who live in cities who come out to the desert to
7 have a good time.

8 Also, I think you need to take a hard look at
9 the economic viability. You say, well, we have looked
10 into the future to see what's going to be viable, how
11 many more acres we will need in the future.

12 And, well, are a lot of these projects even
13 going to be viable in the future? I mean, you're
14 giving billions of dollars in loans to these projects
15 that wouldn't really happen otherwise. So are these
16 projects even going to be viable without those huge
17 government subsidies?

18 Also, in terms of technology, I mean, three
19 of your fast-track projects have switched to
20 photovoltaic from the highly touted sterling solar
21 engine, which is, you know, is going bankrupt. And I
22 guess somebody bought them, but, I mean, are they
23 actually going to use that, you know? The government
24 spent a lot of money in terms of research on that.

25 So we're going to photovoltaic, but is that a

1 wise use of our public lands, when we can do the same
2 things on our rooftops and brownfield sites or
3 whatever. But rooftop is really the way to go, and I
4 think that is something to be considered in terms of
5 weight of the use of public lands.

6 And, really, you know, while we have 285,000
7 acres slated for the solar energy zones, and that's,
8 what is it, about one megawatt per 10 acres, so that's
9 28,500 megawatts, that's three times what was the goal
10 of the Energy Policy Act of 2005, and that's kind of
11 dated at this point.

12 So we really need another Energy Policy Act
13 to guide, well, what are our goals in terms of
14 renewable energy, and what -- how do we want to get
15 there? Do we just want to get there through destroying
16 public lands, or can we get there through different
17 avenues?

18 And I think -- I don't know if you can
19 recommend that in a supplemental EIS, but I think that
20 would be a good recommendation to put through because
21 it seems like you -- maybe it's because of policies put
22 forth by those higher, but you all are just kind of
23 stumbling through this process, and you're still
24 stumbling through it, especially with these variance
25 zones, and you really need a concrete goal to guide

1 you. So if I were you, I would ask for that.

2 I think that's all I have to say. So thank
3 you.

4 (Applause.)

5 MS. HARTMANN: Okay. And Adam Eventov.
6 After that, we will have Pat Flanagan. Is Pat here?

7 MS. FLANAGAN: I'm here.

8 MR. EVENTOV: Hello. My name is Adam
9 Eventov. I'm representing BrightSource Energy, pinch-
10 hitting for Arthur Haubenstock who could not be here
11 tonight.

12 On behalf of BrightSource, we appreciate the
13 work that the BLM and the Department of Energy have done
14 for the Solar PEIS.

15 We also appreciate all of the work that the
16 Department of the Interior has done to support
17 renewable energy and achieve the administration's goal.

18 We believe that renewable energy zones can be
19 very helpful and can expedite permitting and
20 transmission. However, it is also important to allow
21 flexibility for development in appropriate areas
22 outside of these zones.

23 Suitable lands should not be placed off
24 limits to development and exclusions should be strictly
25 limited to those necessary to protect critically

1 sensitive resources.

2 We are confident that the final Solar PEIS
3 will provide a robust solar program that will promote
4 the environmentally responsible development the nation
5 needs to meet its renewable energy and climate goals and
6 to protect our precious sources.

7 MS. HARTMANN: And is Rick Brodie here? You
8 will be next.

9 MS. FLANAGAN: Good evening. My name is Pat
10 Flanagan. I represent the Morongo Basin Conservation
11 Association. It's an organization that for 47 years
12 has been a community-based, non-profit, incorporated as
13 a 501C4, dedicated to preserving the economic and
14 environmental welfare of the Morongo Basin.

15 And I will limit my comments specifically to
16 looking at the California map that's available on
17 the wall back there and the wallpaper across it of
18 pink and blue variance zones, and I look that these
19 zones surround the marine base, they surround one of
20 two edges the natural park, they surround field and
21 wilderness areas, and I believe that in this
22 surrounding, and what I hear this evening,
23 consideration is not being given to communities of
24 which - are within the Morongo Basin.

25 You have 70,000 people who live there and who

1 have a concern economically for themselves as gateway
2 communities, and to have that kind of blue and pink on
3 our boundaries does not in any way reflect the general
4 plans of the communities.

5 I also would like to say that I wonder where
6 the Department of Defense is in this. Billions of
7 dollars have been spent by the Department of Defense,
8 the Department of Interior, California Fish and Game,
9 private money, non-profit organization money, to
10 protect lands that have been well-studied in terms of
11 their wildlife corridor and linkage, and this is not
12 reflected there.

13 There are two studies that -- one of which is
14 -- actually, both of which are general and some within
15 the general, it is backed up by something more specific.

16 You can look at South Coast Wildlands, also
17 called now SC Wildlands. They are currently undergoing
18 the work for the California Desert Conductivity Linkage
19 Planning areas. But in the past, they also have -- let
20 me make sure I get the name right -- the California
21 Central Habitat Connectivity Project, which also
22 includes the Morongo Basin, which is perhaps the best
23 study.

24 It is the best study because there's a real
25 concern by the Department of Defense that the 29 Palms

1 Marine Base, which is the largest Marine base in the
2 world, and which is a live fire training base, so that
3 everybody who goes to Afghanistan and passed to Iraq
4 would go through there, and they have concerns, I know,
5 that there would be solar energy around their base, and
6 I don't believe that -- I'm speaking for what -- I'm
7 not speaking for the Department of Defense, but I'm
8 wondering why they are surrounded by variance lands. I
9 think that's what I should call them.

10 The national park, Joshua Tree National Park,
11 there are a number of studies that are done for
12 especially desert tortoise and Joshua trees, but desert
13 tortoise particularly, that look at the populations
14 that will be moving with climate change, and this is
15 not allowing for those populations to move. And, in
16 some respects, particularly the ones down in Desert
17 Center, it is very possibly going to destroy those
18 populations, so there won't be anything there to move.

19 So between the linkage problem, between
20 supporting communities who have a tourism base, and --
21 I would ask you to please look at those more carefully.
22 Thank you.

23 (Applause.)

24 MS. BRODIE: Hello. My name is Rickie
25 Brodie. I'm here just speaking as a citizen of Palm

1 Desert.

2 So, ladies and gentleman, we residents of
3 Riverside County are proud of all we have done to make
4 the solar industry welcome here. The solar industry
5 gives us a big edge in terms of Riverside County being
6 seen as a progressive, future-looking county.

7 The Riverside County Board of Supervisors has
8 approved a comprehensive solar power plan policy
9 requiring large-scale solar developers to pay \$450 per
10 acre to compensate the county for use of the
11 property and for committing immense tracts of land
12 exclusively to solar development, more than 25
13 suggested power plants for the county, covering
14 approximately 118,000 acres in Eastern Riverside
15 County.

16 The projects are expected to deeply change
17 the look of the desert, eliminating all of its other
18 potential uses. A great many acres of land are needed
19 to help the society transition from fossil fuels to
20 renewal fuels.

21 We residents of Riverside County have done as
22 much as possible to enable the solar industry to begin
23 work here as soon as possible. The Board of
24 Supervisors is even giving a 10 percent reduction in
25 fees for projects begun before December 2014.

1 But Riverside County has responsibilities to
2 others besides the solar industry. We also have
3 responsibilities to residents and to those who live in
4 this country because they love the desert.

5 There are side effects to our commitment to
6 solar power. Desert landscape will be scarred forever.
7 Wildlife habitat will be destroyed.

8 It is apparent to me that Riverside County
9 has given its all to the solar industry. The acreages
10 going to the industry are extremely generous. However,
11 BLM has left a door open for further land use for solar
12 because of the variance process.

13 Due to wildlife and resource conflicts, all
14 areas left in the BLM zone should be deemed unsuitable
15 for development.

16 Riverside County still deserves and needs
17 unspoiled desert, and the citizens of our county cannot
18 lose any more of our precious legacy. We have done
19 more than our share to establish solar power in the
20 desert. Now our wildlife and desert habitat must be
21 protected. Thank you.

22 (Applause.)

23 MS. HARTMANN: Thank you, Rickie.

24 We have John Stewart. And after John -- is
25 April Sall here?

1 MR. STEWART: Good evening. John Stewart,
2 resource consultant for the California Association of
3 Four Wheel Drive Clubs.

4 In looking at the Solar PEIS, you look at the
5 objectives, and one of the objectives talks to minimize
6 potential negative environmental, social, and economic
7 impacts.

8 Whether you're looking at the Supplemental or
9 the original Solar PEIS, you have to ask the question,
10 "How can you minimize the potential negative impacts
11 when the true environmental, social, and economic
12 issues are not fully described, let alone defined?"

13 So there still needs to be a lot of work in
14 the area of how that is going to be accomplished, how
15 you're going to look at what the economic impacts and
16 the social impacts are, as they are not defined. Your
17 impacts to recreation are not defined because you don't
18 talk to recreational impacts.

19 Another objective is you facilitate near-term
20 utility-scale solar energy development on public
21 lands. Well, near-term. Let's just look at near-term.

22 As these projects are expected to be around
23 for 20 or more years, that's basically a generation.
24 Why enter into something in such a quick fashion
25 without doing a thorough economic and a thorough

1 environmental and a thorough social study on the
2 impacts.

3 Now, again, there is no defined
4 rehabilitation or restoration when these developments
5 are expected to come to an end. That is, once a
6 project is completed, what happens? They just walk
7 away? There's nothing defined about this. Because in
8 the construction development, they will be recontouring
9 the land. How about returning it to its natural state?

10 Then, lastly, looking at something that has -
11 - that is completely missing within the studies is the
12 geographic locations.

13 When you start looking at a close review of
14 the maps, many of these solar zones are located in
15 alluvial plains. These alluvial plains are landforms
16 that are flood zones.

17 So, and, again, where you start recontouring
18 the lands, now you are changing the water flow
19 patterns, or the potential.

20 So additional impacts need to be closely
21 looked at for wherever these projects are going to be
22 sited, whether these be in the approved zones or in any
23 of the variance zones.

24 Then, lastly, looking at the concepts of the
25 geographic landforms, throughout Southern California,

1 there are many seismically active zones. Seismic activity
2 and the effects of potential earthquake faults that
3 fall along the lines of some of these zones have not been
4 identified.

5 So, again, there is still a lot lacking in
6 the Supplemental that needs to be studied, needs to be
7 looked at. Thank you.

8 MS. HARTMANN: And after April, we will have
9 Ruth Nolan.

10 MS. SALL: Good evening. April Sall,
11 Conservation Director for the Wildlands Conservancy.

12 My grandmother homesteaded in a very remote,
13 water-blessed canyon in the desert near Pioneer Town,
14 California. That canyon is now part of a preserve,
15 which is owned and managed by the Wildlands
16 Conservancy, which I am the current manager of. TWC
17 is a 5133 non-profit that was formed to protect
18 wildlands and to do free outdoor education for
19 children.

20 It is an honor to live in and manage this
21 canyon as a third-generation resident of my family, and
22 just a year and a half after taking that position, it
23 was severely burned in a wildfire. About 95 percent of
24 the preserve was burned, and this fragile desert
25 landscape was changed overnight. I experienced

1 firsthand how a drastic event can impact these
2 extremely fragile desert lands literally overnight.

3 Shortly after that fire, I learned and
4 organized opposition around the Los Angeles Department of
5 Water and Power's Palomar Transmission Project. Since
6 that time, I have spent a majority of my time, both
7 personally and on the job, working on renewable energy
8 issues and fighting to protect lands that we have
9 already saved and conserved.

10 Beginning in 1999, Wildlands Conservancy
11 began an acquisition project known as the Catellus
12 Land Purchase. We purchased over 630,000
13 acres of Mojave Desert, checkerboarded land, with
14 private money, and donated it to the federal government
15 and our public land system.

16 This was the largest land acquisition gift to
17 the American public in U.S. history. We thought our
18 work was done in conserving the great landscape in the
19 Mojave Desert, until the 2005 Energy Policy Act opened
20 up these lands for renewable energy development.

21 While we support the move towards renewable
22 resources and renewable energy in this country, we
23 would like to honor our public lands system and begin
24 with a no-regrets policy that focuses on already
25 disturbed land.

1 We support the removal of the Iron Mountain,
2 a remote area in the core of the Mojave Desert, but we
3 do not support the alternative, the modified renewable
4 solar energy program alternative with the variance
5 lands.

6 These variance lands are the connective
7 tissue between our wilderness and national park system
8 units. They connect the Mojave Desert for wildlife and
9 ecological corridors, for public recreation, and
10 include cultural sites and irreplaceable resources.

11 We support the zones-only alternative with
12 the opportunity to develop an additional SEZ in the
13 West Mojave or utilize the Desert Renewable Energy
14 Conservation Plan to reach that opportunity.

15 The flawed assumptions in the Supplemental,
16 such as the fact that 75 percent of the development
17 will occur on public land, is still very frustrating.

18 Conservation groups, such as the Wildlands
19 Conservancy, have identified over 200,000 acres of
20 previously disturbed land close to existing
21 transmission corridors with willing sellers. It is
22 appropriate for renewable energy development and below
23 5 percent slope. These lands are also closer to their
24 point of views and the increased energy efficiency.

25 Furthermore, with the change in technology

1 and the switch towards most projects utilizing
2 photovoltaic technology, these projects can be scalable
3 and utilize checkerboard land and smaller parcels of
4 land, such as those found in the West Mojave.

5 The UC research scientists described the
6 Mojave Desert as one of the last most intact ecosystems
7 in the world. It is irresponsible and unnecessary to
8 prematurely destroy these lands, these intact desert
9 lands, while several other alternatives exist,
10 including utilizing previously disturbed lands.

11 We support a no-regrets policy that
12 prioritizes disturbed lands because there will be no
13 Superfund that can fix this mess or restore these
14 fragile desert lands.

15 It is time to learn from the hasty decisions
16 and mistakes of the past in land management and honor
17 and protect and conserve our public land for current
18 and future generations.

19 (Applause.)

20 MS. NOLAN: Hi. My name is Ruth Nolan. I'm
21 a professor of English and California Desert Literature
22 at College of the Desert here in Palm Desert.

23 I'm also a former employee of the BLM. I
24 worked for several years for the California Desert
25 District as a seasonal firefighter, and I'm a native of

1 the Mojave Desert like April.

2 I would like to thank everybody for the
3 opportunity to speak, and I'm just going to register my
4 serious concerns about the government's renewable
5 energy policy and the designation of California
6 wildland, public lands, and other western and
7 southwestern lands. We may be talking about just one
8 site here, but this is part of -- this is just the tip
9 of the iceberg.

10 And I have a student from Holland this
11 semester, and he is just really baffled, and his
12 question was, "In Europe, we have rooftop solar. So
13 why is your government going to destroy the desert to
14 do the solar?" And it's just very confusing to him
15 because in Europe, as for many people here, the desert
16 is a national treasure.

17 And, as April said, it's one of our last
18 large and intact ecosystems, not only full of special
19 animals and plants and ecosystems, but cultural and
20 historical resources, that are not just facts of the
21 past but areas that are still being used by not only
22 recreationalists but Native American people in the
23 entire desert.

24 I have walked this land. This is my home.
25 All these places where solar and wind are being

1 proposed, I know what's out there, and I have combined
2 my life's time spent in the desert in an anthology I
3 did for Heyday Books called "No Place for Puritans, The
4 Literature of California's Deserts," which I use as an
5 education resource for my students and in lectures and
6 talks and workshops I give throughout the country on
7 the California Desert.

8 And one of my concerns here is that so much
9 of what's celebrated in the book, things that describe
10 this area as a living, breathing landscape, where
11 culture and history and environment flow as one, more
12 than anywhere else left in our country, is that I will
13 be forced to tell my students that "If you want to see
14 a desert tortoise, you're going to have to look at a
15 picture in a book."

16 If I tell my future grandchildren to go out
17 and see something in the desert, they are going to be
18 confronted with a fenced-off wasteland.

19 I do not know why our government -- that we
20 should know better, we are at a time in our world's
21 history when we all know better than to raze an
22 ecosystem and call that being renewable and being
23 responsible. It just doesn't work like that.

24 And for those of us who do know what's out
25 here, this is, like, really appalling. Anyone who grew

1 up in the desert, even though it's not my generation,
2 remembers Chinatown, the landgrab done by Los Angeles
3 in the northern Mojave in the Owens Valley. That's a
4 well-kept secret at the time, and I see this renewable
5 landgrab of the desert southwest as our 21st Century
6 version of Chinatown.

7 Because the majority of -- I don't see this
8 considered in the PEIS in the revised version, who is
9 benefiting from this? Where is the energy being
10 shipped? And I just can't see this as anything else
11 except a landgrab. A landgrab that's going to make a
12 handful of people really wealthy and at the expense of
13 the taxpayers.

14 As many of my students are really surprised
15 to find out, these stimulus funds come from our money.
16 So anyone who has a job is paying for this, and there's
17 already been a lot of reckless usage of millions and
18 millions of dollars in funds.

19 So I do feel that our government failed us by
20 pimping out our precious land and then trying to tell
21 us it's for our own good. Because the idea to ruin
22 something in order to save something is a complete
23 oxymoron and doesn't translate into something
24 realistic.

25 I also do have some concerns about the usage

1 of water. Water is a precious commodity in the West,
2 and I want to know if there's anything that addresses
3 the amount of water required for these particular solar
4 projects.

5 What about health concerns? I myself have
6 been suffering from Valley Fever, which is an airborne
7 -- I'm an English teacher, so I don't know the
8 scientific name for the airborne fungus, but I
9 contracted this some years ago when a pristine desert
10 area next door to where I live was plowed up for
11 development.

12 This is a rising health concern in the
13 Southwest, and I'm very concerned. We see a lot of
14 dirt and wind, blowing sand here when the wind blows,
15 and the wind blows in the desert many, many days of the
16 year.

17 So these are among concerns I would like to
18 see addressed, along with other environmental hazards,
19 pollution. Do we see toxic by-products seeping into our
20 water, the Colorado River Aquifer?

21 So, anyway, I would also just like to ask our
22 government to reconsider its Federal Renewable Energy
23 Policy Plan because it seems to be something that is
24 not going to be healthy for anybody or anything in the
25 long run.

1 Thank you very much, and I appreciate the
2 chance to speak.

3 (Applause.)

4 MS. HARTMANN: Thank you, Ruth.

5 Pat Flanagan?

6 (Inaudible.)

7 So then Victoria Fuller.

8 I'm sorry. I've got people twice.

9 Oh, here it is. Mr. or Mrs. Fleck?

10 Afterwards it will be Carl Zichella.

11 MS. FLECK: Good evening. Just listening to
12 the comments --

13 MS. HARTMANN: Tell us your name.

14 MS. FLECK: Oh, I'm sorry. Almut Fleck, A-l-
15 m-u-t, F, like in Frank, l-e-c-k.

16 I carefully listened to all the comments, and
17 it is obvious that so much more thought has to go into
18 it and research in the transmission lines themselves,
19 and this has not been addressed.

20 There are studies that show that there are
21 effects on the people living in the vicinity of them,
22 and I would like to see more of that addressed.

23 We heard about all the different negative
24 effects of this project, and I just want to say, do not
25 fast track this project.

1 Thank you very much.

2 MR. ZICHELLA: Carl Zichella, Director of
3 Western Transmission for the Natural Resources Defense
4 Council (NRDC). I'm here representing our membership. We
5 have 250,000 members who support us here in California.

6 NRDC has been deeply involved in both land
7 conservation and energy efficiency, energy
8 conservation, distributing, generation, and large-scale
9 energy issues for quite some time.

10 We believe that to respond efficiently and
11 effectively to climate change, we're going to need
12 renewable energy development at all scales. We need to
13 do as much as we can with energy efficiency,
14 distributing, and generation, but we also are going to
15 need some large-scale, utility-scale generation as
16 well.

17 And the key to doing that right is making
18 sure it gets placed in the right places. Getting those
19 areas identified and developed in a timely way is
20 critically important for climate radiation.

21 Every particle of what we put into the
22 atmosphere today is with us for a century, and to the
23 extent that we can make this transition that others
24 have spoken about to a more renewable future, we need
25 to do that quickly. Time is of the essence.

1 Changes that are already being observed from
2 desert ecosystems are going to be accelerating. It's
3 not an excuse to do things in a haphazard way. And, in
4 fact, we have, NRDC has struggled with and feels that
5 BLM's effort to move away from a simple project-by-
6 project approach is a big improvement over where we've
7 been for the last, I'd say, four or five years.

8 We have made enormous efforts to try to work
9 with project developers and transmission sponsors to
10 reduce the impact of these kinds of developments for
11 the existing developments, but also, perhaps more
12 importantly, to come up with a program moving forward
13 that focuses on appropriate zones for development.

14 NRDC believes we need to look for the best
15 available sites, regardless of ownership, and it
16 shouldn't be focused on a public lands only process.
17 In fact, as many have said, there are other good sites
18 off the public lands, too.

19 We do commend the department for recognizing
20 the short-comings of the existing approach and for
21 looking for a different, better way. Specifically, we
22 commend you for reaffirming in the Supplemental Draft
23 EIS your commitment to zone-based development.

24 Guiding solar development to appropriate
25 places is a way to ensure that the benefits of solar

1 energy are realized, while the unique and sensitive
2 resources of public lands are protected.

3 While the department clearly listened to many
4 public comments it received, and there is remarkable
5 changes from the draft -- and thank you for that -- our
6 analysis reveals that it wasn't particularly well
7 through consensus comments submitted by a group of
8 other environmental organizations, utilities, and solar
9 developers that NRDC helped pull together.

10 That was a hard-won consensus, and we are
11 pleased to see that much of it's reflected in the
12 revised plan represented in the Supplement.

13 For example, we recommended that the
14 department and the department is proposing a clear
15 process for designating new zones, along with clear
16 criteria for use in that process.

17 Also, appropriate areas for development
18 identified through processes, such as the Desert
19 Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, the West Chocolate
20 Mountain EIS will be designated zones.

21 Incentives will be provided for projects
22 located in designated zones and -- excuse me -- as well
23 as for transmission in designated zones and to those
24 zones.

25 And the department has recognized the need to

1 provide flexibility for well-sited projects outside
2 zones with the new variance projects.

3 These and other new program components, once
4 adopted, will reduce project costs, shorten time
5 frames, and provide greater certainty for all
6 stakeholders, including conservationists and the solar
7 industry, that solar development will move forward on
8 our public lands.

9 We look forward to working with the
10 department, our colleagues in the conservation
11 community, and members of the solar industry to
12 finalize a comprehensive and sound final framework for
13 solar energy on public lands as quickly and as
14 positively as possible.

15 And I think the department has done a good
16 job, has been very attentive to the public comment, and
17 we look forward to getting this process to move forward
18 so we can get the appropriate developments in the right
19 place. Thank you.

20 MS. HARTMANN: Okay. Thank you, Carl.

21 I have two more people signed up to speak. V.
22 John White, and then after that, Pam Eaton. And then
23 after you two have spoken, we will see if anyone who
24 wasn't signed up wants to speak.

25 MR. WHITE: Good evening. My name is V. John

1 White. I'm the director of the Center of Energy
2 Efficiency and Renewable Technologies, which is based
3 in Sacramento. We are a coalition of clean energy
4 advocates --

5 THE REPORTER: I'm sorry. I can't hear you.
6 Can you speak up?

7 MR. WHITE: We are a coalition of clean
8 energy developers and clean energy advocates, including
9 both companies that develop solar, wind, geothermal, as
10 well as environmental groups that work on climate and
11 backing out coal.

12 We've been active on this process, and I
13 don't know want to talk too long because there's a lot
14 of important comments you've already heard.

15 (Inaudible.)

16 MR. WHITE: Excuse me?

17 MS. HARTMANN: I think if you just, if you
18 pull it closer to you.

19 MR. WHITE: There's a couple of issues I
20 wanted to highlight that I don't think others have
21 raised. One is I think there's severe problems with
22 the competitive leasing proposal that you have included
23 in this. I think this is really not the place. This
24 is about trying to get the land use and the permitting
25 design for solar rights.

1 This is a very different industry than
2 extractive industries. You're renting the land.
3 You're not extracting resources from the land. And
4 presumably there will be obligations to restore the
5 land.

6 Also, a gross revenue is not the right way to
7 approach something like this. It's much more akin to a
8 lease or a rental. And I think if there's going to be
9 revenues raised in this fashion, it needs to be
10 examined for the potential to also be sent back to
11 local government.

12 Issues we have here in Riverside are the
13 public benefit of the development, and on the federal
14 lands there needs to revenue sharing. But also we need
15 to be very careful how we go about putting this kind of
16 new leasing in place. We are also trying to change the
17 way we plan and build the resource.

18 Secondly, we generally support the movement
19 towards zones, but those zones have to be adequate and
20 have to include areas that have the best value as well
21 as the land being protected for conservation.

22 One of the failures that the BLM has not yet
23 reconciled is that, when it did the West Mojave Plan,
24 there was no consideration whatsoever of the solar
25 energy resource in the West Mojave.

1 Everybody else was at the table, but this was
2 during a period when we had fallen asleep and gotten
3 involved with deregulation and building more fossil
4 fuel plants, and we forgot about the renewable energy
5 potential in the West Mojave.

6 We accommodated mining, we accommodated
7 outdoor vehicles, we accommodated wilderness, we
8 accommodated military, but we didn't look at solar at
9 all, and yet West Mojave, the land is largely
10 undisturbed. A lot of it is marginal agricultural. A
11 lot of the habitat is marginal. There's military lands
12 there that have weapons on them. There's trash. It's
13 not pristine in the same way that other areas of the
14 desert are.

15 The other thing about the West Mojave is this
16 land has the very, very best radiation of anywhere in
17 North America, and it's 10 percent better than even in
18 the East Mojave, which means that if you build a solar
19 thermal plant -- which is the technology we think still
20 has promise.

21 The world is going towards PV because the
22 Chinese have flooded the market with cheap panels. But
23 the value for the future may well rest with other
24 technologies that currently are more expensive, like
25 solar panels that use the land much more efficiently,

1 that produce much more energy per acre, a much more
2 higher quality than PV, and it is very dependent on the
3 high radiation.

4 And we have done some mapping and made some
5 suggested improvements to the Desert Renewable Energy
6 Conservation Plan, but the big failure is that this
7 Supplemental did not add any land on the BLM area of
8 the West Mojave into the mix, even to study.

9 We know that there is Mojave ground squirrel
10 land up there that needs to be evaluated, but the
11 Mojave ground squirrel is not the only interest that
12 should be considered in developing a resource of this
13 importance.

14 So we urge you to reconsider the exclusion of
15 the public land in the West Mojave. We think that that
16 land has better radiation, better transmission, fewer
17 conservation values, compared to other places, and
18 while we make more areas off limits to protect for
19 conservation and to identify things that people are
20 concerned about, we need to also take some time to
21 evaluate areas, new areas that should be added that
22 have high resource potential and are medium- or low-
23 conflict land, for overriding considerations would argue
24 for them to be included.

25 So we would urge that action to occur, and we

1 wish you well in your deliberations. You have a lot of
2 things to consider, a lot of important public comments
3 here tonight and elsewhere, and we thank you for your
4 attention.

5 MS. EATON: Hi. I'm Pam Eaton, with the
6 Wilderness Society, and I'm based in Denver, Colorado.
7 And I wanted to just speak briefly because a lot of the
8 things that I wanted to say have already been said.

9 But I will say that the Wilderness Society
10 has a 75-year history of working on the protection of
11 public land, and we are deeply engaged in trying to
12 find solutions to the challenge of addressing the
13 challenge of climate change, reducing gas emissions,
14 and moving forward with renewable energy and looking at a
15 variety of solutions that are needed: Energy
16 efficiency, conservation, DG, and -- or distributed
17 generation. I spend too much time with people who just
18 use acronyms a lot of times, so I apologize if I use a
19 lot of them today.

20 But part of the solution, and especially
21 trying to move forward quickly and getting at this
22 problem in a way that really is going to fundamentally
23 address this, is going to be large scale. And so we
24 appreciate the opportunity to work with the BLM and the
25 DOE and others in trying to find solutions that really

1 guide that development to the appropriate places.

2 On the public lands, I think that really
3 should be a zone-based process. I think the Supplement
4 moves in the right direction, really looking for those
5 low-conflict areas that can allow renewable energy to
6 move forward but in a way that minimizes its impact on
7 our other values of our public lands.

8 The Supplement, as others have said,
9 addresses a lot of recommendations. We're going to
10 make many detailed comments, as you know, in writing,
11 as we have throughout this process.

12 So I just wanted to identify a couple of
13 things that, you know, we think that there are real
14 benefits of moving away from the project-by-project,
15 identifying the zones, moving forward, being able to
16 move projects more quickly in the right places, and to
17 think about transmission to the right places.

18 We do believe that there's an opportunity to
19 grow the lands that are available in an appropriate way
20 in California. We absolutely think BLM needs to commit
21 significant resources to working through the RECP, you
22 know, the Renewable Energy Conservation Plan, to find
23 those additional areas and to really find the places
24 that are most appropriate to do that in the context of
25 thinking about mitigation and conservation in the

1 desert.

2 And then finally, I guess I would just
3 identify that there are additional improvements that
4 need to be made. There are additional areas that
5 should be excluded from consideration, including across
6 the West, areas that have high-value wilderness,
7 conservation. Citizens Proposed Wilderness Areas
8 and others.

9 And then in the way that you move forward
10 with implementing this decision, we think it is really
11 important that these be embodied in the resource
12 management plans and not just in policy that's
13 guidance. And we realize you have committed to that,
14 and we think that's really critical.

15 So thank you for the opportunity. Thank you
16 for the work and the consideration that you've given to
17 comments. And this is an ongoing process, and it will
18 continue to improve, I think, between now and the
19 final, and we are looking forward to seeing some of
20 those elements that you talked about that we still
21 haven't seen the outcome of yet.

22 So there's still a lot of work to be done,
23 but looking forward to getting it done quickly and
24 getting this new program up and running. Thank you.

25 MS. HARTMANN: Is there anyone else who

1 wasn't signed up?

2 MR. SHTEIR: I've signed up, but I'd like the
3 opportunity to speak again, briefly.

4 MS. HARTMANN: That will be fine. I'm just
5 going to make sure that there's no one that hasn't
6 spoken yet that wants to speak. Is there anyone else?

7 Okay. Seth. Is that correct?

8 MR. SHTEIR: Seth Shteir, National Parks
9 Conservation Association.

10 I'd like to echo what I've heard tonight
11 about the variance lands being the connective tissue of
12 the California Desert. And really, that connective
13 tissue is not only ecological, it's not only
14 historical, it's not only cultural, but it is also
15 economic.

16 In truth, tourism is the lifeblood of a lot
17 of our desert economy, and our natural parks and
18 wildlands, they are powerful economic engines.

19 Utility-scale solar development, while having
20 some benefits, also has the potential to disrupt
21 wildlife, air quality, water resources, dark night
22 skies, and recreation. And it is important that we
23 consider the economic value of our wildlands and
24 natural parks as this process moves forward.

25 Let me just cite some statistics from a very

1 important study by Michigan State University that
2 really looks at the economic value of Joshua Tree
3 National Park.

4 So in 2010, there were 1.4 million visits to
5 Joshua Tree National Park and 287,000 overnight stays.
6 Those visitors spent \$58.8 million within 30 miles of
7 Joshua Tree National Park. Those are in our gateway
8 communities. And they supported 732 jobs.

9 So as this process moves forward, it is
10 important that the ecological value of our wildlands is
11 considered and national parks, it's important cultural
12 resources are considered, it's important history is
13 considered, but it's also important to consider the
14 economic value of national parks and wildlands and to
15 do our best to protect them. Thank you.

16 (Applause.)

17 MR. SMITH: I'm Paul Smith from the 29 Palms
18 Inn in 29 Palms, California, and I'd like to just
19 address several issues, some of which have been touched
20 on, one which has not.

21 I enjoy writing about history, as Ruth Nolan
22 does, and one of the things that's not been properly
23 emphasized in the planning that's been going on for the
24 siting and implementation of these has been
25 preservation and protection of Native American cultural

1 sites. And I would strongly urge that that be given a
2 renewed, really hard look.

3 There are people who have difficulty even
4 affording coming here to a meeting like this who are
5 seriously adversely spiritually affected by what's
6 going on.

7 The second thing I'd like to comment on is to
8 reinforce Seth Shteir's comments on the economic
9 effects of what happens when our desert landscape is
10 disturbed.

11 We have a real small inn. We have 23 rooms,
12 a restaurant. We are located right at the outpost, or
13 the outskirts of Joshua Tree National Park.

14 We have visitors who come to the 29 Palms Inn
15 from all over the world, it's well-known throughout the
16 world, and the surveys show -- the survey just recently
17 done within the last year by the University of Idaho --
18 that the primary reason why people visit Joshua Tree
19 National Park is it's wide-open, beautiful vistas, and
20 we have to be aware that these sites can adversely
21 impact those vistas. They already are doing so down in
22 the southeastern corner of the national park, and these
23 are important values.

24 Our little inn, our tiny little inn,
25 contributes between two and a half and \$3 million in

1 revenue just in our local area, and probably close to
2 \$4 million to four and a half million dollars in
3 revenues in the larger metropolitan areas extending
4 into Los Angeles where we buy a lot of food products
5 and that sort of thing.

6 While in the great scheme of things, and the
7 need for alternative energy, which we totally back, in
8 the great scheme of things, that may not seem like a
9 lot of money. To small communities out in the desert,
10 this ability to maintain that tourism is very important
11 and very valuable.

12 And the larger thing would relate to what
13 Seth Shteir said that our national parks and the
14 wilderness areas contribute a great value to what we
15 do.

16 One of the most important things that was
17 said tonight, which I think has been echoed by the
18 Environmental Protection Agency comments, the wildlands
19 conservancy commented that they have identified 200,000
20 acres. That's most -- that's a significant portion of
21 what's been described as a needed area, which is
22 already located on degraded land.

23 Degraded land, of course, wouldn't affect our
24 tourism culture, our tourism commerce. It probably
25 would even have a positive effect in terms of its

1 effect on wildlife. It wouldn't permanently destroy
2 the desert soils, the cryptobiotic soils, which, once
3 they are disturbed, they don't get restored.

4 For those of you who are in Washington, a
5 wonderful, exciting trip you could have would be to go
6 out into the desert here and see what the Patton
7 training forces did to the desert soils fighting a
8 major, important war.

9 Those soils are still disturbed and have not
10 recovered. You can still see, what is it, 70 years
11 later, you can still see the tire tracks and the metal
12 track signs where they would turn their tanks.

13 So that the fragility of the desert should be
14 borne in mind, and that's a desert that transcends just
15 California. 90 percent of the biota in the desert is
16 below the desert soil, or below the surface of the
17 desert. So a lot of it that you think is a relatively
18 dry environment, without a lot of things growing, is
19 actually a very rich, biological environment.

20 So thank you. I'd like to encourage you to
21 think about these things, particularly what wasn't
22 stated tonight about the cultural heritage of the
23 desert. Thank you.

24 MS. HARTMANN: Is there anyone else who would
25 like to speak?

1 We will be here for a little while if anyone
2 wants to talk or ask questions.

3 The transcript from today's meeting will be
4 on the website in a few weeks, as well as the
5 materials, if you couldn't see from the back.

6 All right. Well, thank you all for coming.

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1 CERTIFICATE OF NOTARY PUBLIC

2 I, BEVERLY NEWMAN, the officer before whom the
3 foregoing meeting was taken, does hereby certify that the
4 statements made during the meeting were taken by me in
5 machine shorthand and audio recording and thereafter
6 reduced to typewriting under my direction; that said
7 transcript is a true record of the proceedings taken by
8 me; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor
9 employed by any of the parties to the action for which
10 this transcript was made; and, further, that I am not a
11 relative or employee of any party involved in the
12 action for which this transcript was made, nor am I
13 financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of
14 this action.

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BEVERLY NEWMAN, CSR 2872

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