

Thank you for your comment, Shaun Gonzales.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is SolarM60108.

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The development of Solar energy in the deserts of the southwest should pay close consideration to a number of conditions and processes that could be severely disturbed by the construction and operation of large energy projects, the transmission lines for the power produced, the impact of increased human presence, and the impact on less quantifiable qualities of the deserts, to include the value of pristine and uninterrupted vistas, and the need to preserve an expansive wilderness that has had an impact on American heritage and cultural values. To disrupt this land without considering the complexity of the ecosystems and the values placed on open wilderness by the American people would counteract the benefits of "green energy" and irreversibly shift the costs to the fragile desert ecosystems. The United States Government should ensure proper siting of renewable energy projects in the deserts, and must offset the impact of further development in this wilderness.

Specific steps include:

Proper Siting:

--Limiting the transfer of non-native species to the deserts from survey, construction, and site operations.

--Consideration of the potential impact of the construction and operation of energy development on critical habitat that may adjoin properties designated for development. This consideration should also extend to species that are threatened or endangered by virtue of their limited population or habitat, but have not yet officially been classified as an endangered species. Impacts include but are not limited to water run-off, advantages and disadvantages imposed on desert species by the structures of the energy site, and the resulting impact on ecosystem processes (bird perching opportunities, shade, concentrated water run off, thermals, etc), and how these structures may also provide advantages to non-native species.

--Siting energy development to avoid necessitating the construction of additional transmission lines which would expand the negative impacts of energy development on the habitat and undisturbed vistas.

--Siting energy development and transmission lines in proximity to population centers, thus reducing the negative impact of "green energy" development on the ecosystem and increasing the economic benefit by lowering infrastructure costs, construction costs, and costs of transportation for personnel and support of site operations

Offset:

--Consult with public and private organizations in desert populations centers to study and deploy institutional means of harvesting solar energy within the population centers, to include installation of solar energy panels on rooftops of public and private buildings. Encouraging renewable energy development in population centers expands awareness of the benefits of renewable energy and would likely produce more jobs, while also limiting the need to develop costly infrastructure on public lands which hold many other values, to include recreation, wildlife conservation, and mineral wealth.

--Designating more desert lands as National Parks or wilderness, to include the "Catellus Lands" in the Mojave Desert along the Interstate 40 corridor in California. Preservation of the Catellus and adjoining lands between Joshua Tree National Park and the

Mojave National Preserve would conserve a wildlife corridor which is also home to critical Desert Tortoise habitat, and preserve the scenic vistas along National Trails Highway/Route 66, which carries significance for American history and heritage.

--Private energy developers and the United States Government should invest in further research into desert ecosystem processes and the impact of development, and also invest in non-profit organizations that research, preserve, and promote awareness of the history and heritage of the American southwest.

--Increase the staffing of BLM and National Park service personnel in the southwestern deserts to ensure proper adherence to land use rules ( restrictions on new road development in wilderness areas, deterrence to illegal dumping, etc), and to monitor the impact of increased development and human presence on the lands.