

Thank you for your comment, RJ Cardin.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is SolarM60156.

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Solar Energy Development PEIS  
Comment ID: SolarM60156

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Comment Submitted:

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this project.

- It is not very clear how this project to study 24 sites is related to the dozens of solar right-of-way applications covering hundreds of thousands of acres around the West. We recently received a mailing for public scoping meetings concerning such an application for some 4000 acres just east of our Buckeye Hills Regional Park and adjacent to the northwest end of Sonoran Desert National Monument. Would all unused applications be terminated once this EIS is completed?

- Solar projects promise to help in the fight against global warming and pollution while weaning the US off its dependence on foreign oil. Such a noble goal can be reached without needlessly damaging large swaths of the natural environment. There are thousands of acres of abandoned or marginal agricultural land in Arizona and other states that would be ideal for solar project development. Just a couple of miles to the north of the Gillespie site is a large area of marginal agricultural land where a company has already announced a solar project. Two other projects are also proposed on used land in the Harquahala Valley and west of Gila Bend, where the sun shines just as brightly. This questions the need to use public land for private projects that can be built elsewhere.

- Any solar project on BLM land should be limited to land damaged by mining or other operations.

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Although none of the three Arizona sites are adjacent to county parks, we feel an obligation to comment on the Gillespie site, the only one in Maricopa County, because of its potential impact on open space and quality of life for residents.

- The Gillespie site is adjacent to or straddles (for 5 miles) a significant portion of Agua Caliente Road. This road is entirely within undeveloped Sonoran Desert on BLM land between Hyder and Arlington. It covers a variety of land formations including isolated volcanic buttes and rugged mountains, passes next to at least one "narrows" type of canyon, and crosses vast stretches of open desert with vistas of distant valleys and mountains. It is the latter type of landscape that would be impacted by the Gillespie site; it would compromise the integrity and variety of the road's landscape.

- The remote, unpaved Agua Caliente Road is in a little-known, scenic area of the state. It has the potential to be a draw for tourists looking for a trip back in time and for classic Sonoran Desert vistas, especially as other parts of the state's deserts are compromised by urban and rural sprawl, mining, and other development. Only the marketing is missing. Unlike the network of rough roads in other protected areas (such as Sonoran Desert National Monument), this is a maintained and through road, ideal for tourists. This road deserves to be designated a Back Country Byway. Again, the Gillespie site would compromise the total experience.

- Contiguous natural open space would be fragmented, as the Gillespie site is not in or adjacent to developed areas. The long, narrow shape of the site would affect a large area that is out of proportion to the acreage of the site.

- The Gillespie site is approximately four miles north of Signal Peak Wilderness. Views from the Wilderness, which covers higher

terrain, would be affected.

- The impact of power lines serving the site should be considered, especially in light of at least one local power company's decision to remove all vegetation beneath and adjacent to their lines north of Phoenix in the name of safety and reliable power as required by the Energy Policy Act of 2005.