

Thank you for your comment, Kevin Emmerich.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is SolarS50019.

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Solar Energy Development PEIS
Comment ID: SolarS50019

First Name: Kevin
Middle Initial: R
Last Name: Emmerich
Organization:
Address: P.O. Box 70
Address 2:
Address 3:
City: Beatty
State: NV
Zip: 89003
Country: USA
Email: atomictoadranch@netzero.net
Privacy Preference: Don't withhold name or address from public record
Attachment:

Comment Submitted:

To Whom it May Concern,

I would like to submit these comments on the Solar Energy Development Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement (Solar Energy Development PEIS). I am very concerned that the BLM is going to sacrifice millions of acres of public lands in the Desert Southwest to big energy companies. While I support clean energy, I think all developments belong on rooftops and previously disturbed areas. The demand for land and large transmission lines has the potential to forever change our environment and quality of life. I also believe that these projects will not bring energy prices down, but drive them up. The only people who will profit from these boondoggles are the power companies, not the American public. My first comment is to extend the comment period past July 7th, 2008. This is not enough time to get all the opinions from the public.

These are my concerns about how big "green" energy will impact the fragile deserts of our public lands and would like these concerns put in environmental reviews.

1. Scraping up of deserts will spread invasive, non-native weeds which will increase the risk of fire.
2. There will be obvious impacts on the scenic quality of the deserts. BLM needs to stop using class 4 descriptions of scenery on public lands. I will decide for myself what I believe is scenic. It is not BLM's place to decide that.
3. If it is really the goal of BLM to reduce CO2 in the atmosphere, than scraping up large tracts of desert will have an adverse effect. The following quotes show that vegetation removal releases carbon in the atmosphere: From "Soil Biology and Carbon Sequestration in Grasslands" by L. Jackson, M. Potthoff, K. Steenwerth, A. O'Geen, M. Stromberg, and K. Scow (In, California grasslands: Ecology and Management, edited by Mark Stromberg, Jeffrey Corbin, and Carla D'Antontio, University of California Press: Berkeley, 2007).

This could apply to arid desert grasslands and other shrub communities...

Grassland soils sequester or store carbon due to plant and soil microorganism productivity, leaf and root litter accumulation (both above and below ground) and the stability of by-products of soil biological processes during decomposition. By storing carbon, grasslands mitigate greenhouse gas emissions.

But when grassland soils are disturbed, such as from tilling, [or bulldozing for solar farms], a large proportion of the soil C is lost, previously utilized by soil microbes. Perennial plant species especially help stabilize soil C from soil microbes, fungi, and invertebrate communities.

Desert plants and soils also use crassulacean acid metabolism and store greater levels of CO₂ than other plants. BLM should make an intensive study on how such major removals of desert soil and vegetation will actually heat up the climate before they grant any of these permits.

4. The amount of water needed to clean these solar panels off will be astronomical. Much water will also be needed for reflector systems? How will this impact local ecology and hydrology? How will the water rights of local people be effected?
5. Many species of wildlife will be individually impacted by such a loss of land. Many of these species are sensitive and protected by the Endangered Species Act. Species like the desert tortoise and Mojave ground squirrel can not afford to lose this much habitat. Helicopters that install these solar plants will disturb sensitive species like bighorn sheep.
6. Many species of sensitive plants will be lost as well.
7. Churned up soils for solar panels will vastly increase the dust kicked up on windy days. This will effect air quality, scenery and quality of public lands.
8. Many of these solar farms are proposed next to wilderness areas and national parks. This will degrade the scenic values of these areas as well as disturb wildlife migration.
9. The amount of land disturbed will no doubt destroy thousands of archaeological sites for all time.
10. Many of these solar farms are proposed for the homelands of native americans. These are sacred homelands. Tribes should be consulted when these proposals come out.
11. Huge, unsightly powerlines will have to be constructed to support these projects. Many powerlines will need to go through or adjacent to wilderness, parks, wildlife refuges etc. Powerlines can create breeding for cowbirds and other species that will effect sensitive species. Powerlines will also degrade the property values of those who live in rural communities. Private land may have to be siezed to make room for powerlines.
12. All solar farms will have a negative impact on property values of those who live in rural communities. BLM should examine the negative impacts to local economies.
13. Powerlines and solar farms will degrade recreational opportunities and possibly cost local tourism economies.
14. BLM should release all locations of proposed solar farms to the public now.
15. There will also be impacts on grazing allotmentes and other uses of public lands.

Thank you