



April 30, 2009

The Honorable Dianne Feinstein
United States Senate
331 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, D.C. 20510
(202) 228-3954 fax

Dear Senator Feinstein:

We are writing to you today to express our appreciation for the strong stand you have taken on desert conservation in the face of recent proposals for solar power development in this extraordinary landscape. Our membership of scientists and laypeople are dedicated to the conservation of California's flora. California's desert habitats have been a focus of our advocacy for many years. We strongly support your effort to establish a new national monument as one measure to advance desert conservation.

We are acutely aware of the need for California and other communities to find alternatives to carbon based energy. We ask that the development of these new energy sources fulfill their "green" promise by protecting at the same time the fragile resources in California's desert system and other natural areas. We offer the following ideas in an effort to advance protection for natural resources while enabling development of these areas for non-carbon based energy to proceed:

Direct projects to degraded or disturbed areas on public or private lands

The use of degraded lands limits the impact to natural resources. The use of degraded lands also requires a less intensive environmental review and is likely to reduce the time it takes to achieve project approval. Consultation with other agencies, such as Section 10 with US Fish and Wildlife Service, would require less time on degraded lands.

Increase the number of projects directed to private lands

This would alleviate some of the demand on public lands while contributing directly to the local county's tax base.

Environmental review should not be eliminated or truncated on public lands

Environmental review is necessary to identify and protect public trust values. Completion of such reviews is critical to fulfilling the promise of "green" and renewable energy.

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Projects should be located near existing transmission lines

Maintaining a small foot print to support energy development will lessen the impacts on the environment and reduce infrastructure costs.

Develop a long term plan for renewable energy development

We acknowledge the urgency to develop energy projects to meet the Renewable Portfolio Standard of 33% by 2020. We expect, however, that energy development beyond this target will be sought. In the long term, the US Bureau of Land Management should engage in a landscape level analysis for siting of all types of renewable energy development in the California desert. This type of comprehensive planning is needed to address management actions that will ensure the long term conservation of the desert ecosystem.

Direct solar development projects to sites within already developed areas

Projects recently undertaken by utilities and cities in southern California to install solar panels on rooftops should be supported and promoted. This approach develops the energy closer to the demand and protects natural resources.

Increase the focus on energy conservation

Fundamental to reducing our carbon footprint is reducing the total amount of energy used.

We recognize the increasing challenge to meet the needs of people while protecting and sustaining the natural environment around us. We are committed to working with you and others to achieve the right balance in California's deserts and other important ecosystems.

Sincerely,

Tara Hansen
Executive Director