



California Wind Energy Association

February 8, 2021

Laura Daniel Davis
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary - Land and Minerals Management
US Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington DC 20240

Re: BLM Proposed Amendments to the DRECP

Via email: laura_daniel-davis@ios.doi.gov

Dear Assistant Secretary Davis:

I write today on behalf of the California Wind Energy Association (CalWEA) and first want to congratulate you on your recent appointment and to convey how pleased we are to see President Biden take strong and immediate actions to restore this nation's progress toward averting the most catastrophic impacts of the climate crisis. We look forward to working with you to achieve the Administration's climate policy goals.

CalWEA wishes to call attention to the draft environmental impact statement (EIS) on proposed plan amendments underlying Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP or Plan), issued by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) on January 13, 2021. We believe this proposal may be consistent with the Administration's climate policy goals and urge that it be considered. When the Plan was adopted in 2015, it was intended to encourage limited renewable energy development on federal lands in California, but it has had the opposite impact and has, instead, foreclosed development opportunities. In advance of the April 15, 2021, comment deadline on this proposal, therefore, CalWEA strongly urges the Administration not to roll back this particular action and, indeed, to carefully consider whether the proposed or alternative amendments to the DRECP are warranted as course corrections to enable the intended renewable energy development – and, specifically, the wind energy development – that will be necessary to achieve the administration's climate policy goals.

CalWEA, along with several of its member companies, was actively engaged throughout the seven-year DRECP process leading up to the adoption of the Plan. CalWEA submitted extensive comments in February 2015 on the draft plan that strongly cautioned that the plan could preclude most, if not all, wind energy development on BLM land in California. The lack of any wind energy development on California BLM land in the four years since the Plan was adopted clearly shows that these cautions were warranted. CalWEA is still reviewing the draft EIS to determine whether the specific areas proposed to be opened for evaluation and potential renewable energy development include significant areas with high-quality wind energy resources where such exploration is now categorically prohibited under the Plan; in any case, such areas could be included in the final plan.

Reconsideration of the DRECP is justified for numerous reasons:

- 1. Consistency with the January 27, 2021, Executive Order on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad.** Section 207 of this Presidential Action directs the Secretary of the Interior, in consultation with other federal agencies and tribal authorities, to review siting and permitting processes on public lands to identify to the new National Climate Task Force steps that can be taken, consistent with applicable law, to increase renewable energy production on those lands while ensuring robust protection for our lands, waters, and biodiversity and creating good jobs. Review of the DRECP is clearly consistent with, and a necessary response to, this directive. Moreover, expanded renewable energy development on federal lands will be an essential component of fulfilling President Biden's goal of achieving 100% carbon-free electricity by 2035, particularly in California where nearly half the land is owned by the federal government.
 - 2. Consistency with Section 3104 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2021.** The omnibus spending bill that Congress passed in December requires the Department of the Interior to set new national goals for renewable production on public land by September 2022 and, by 2025, it must issue permits for at least 25 gigawatts of clean electricity generation. Review of the DRECP is clearly consistent with, and a necessary response to, this directive.
 - 3. Failure of the DRECP to Promote Renewable Energy Development Consistent with Its Own Goals.** As stated in the 2016 Executive Summary of the Record of Decision for the DRECP, the Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) to the three Resource Management Plans that constitute the public-lands component of the DRECP, the Development Focus Areas (DFAs) designated by the LUPA were intended to accommodate more than 8,100 megawatts (MWs) of renewable energy development. That goal included a planning target of 3,070 MW of wind energy development. What has been experienced since the development and 2016 adoption of the DRECP, however, is an almost total collapse of development activity on BLM land. In the case of wind energy, approximately a dozen wind energy projects were being pursued at the time that the DRECP effort was announced in late 2008; none of those projects survived the DRECP process and, to our knowledge, no wind energy applications have been filed with the BLM in the four years since the DRECP was adopted despite the growing demand for renewable energy. Similarly, it is CalWEA's understanding that very few, if any, new applications for solar developments have been filed.
 - 4. Failure of the DRECP to Promote Wind Energy Development Consistent with California's Clean Energy Needs.** Studies addressing how to achieve California's goal of meeting 100 percent of retail electricity sales with zero-carbon resources by 2045 show that on the order of between 20,000 MW and 75,000 MW of wind energy will be required, with greater amounts of wind energy substantially lowering costs. And yet wind energy generation in California has remained flat since the DRECP was adopted in 2016, as much of the state's limited high-quality wind resources on private land have been developed and further development on private land has proved difficult. (Unlike wind energy, solar energy is relatively ubiquitous; thus, California has seen a near-doubling of solar energy generation since 2016.)
 - 5. Failure of the DRECP to Evaluate the Compatibility of Wind Energy with Other DRECP Objectives or to Preserve High-Quality Wind Resources for Evaluation and Potential Development.** As stated in the January 13, 2021, BLM press release announcing the
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proposed amendments, “The previous plan made only 4% of 10.8 million acres managed by the BLM available as renewable energy development focus areas.” The impact of the plan on wind energy was even more severe than this statistic suggests in that approximately 96% of the high-quality wind resources on BLM land were put off limits to developers because of the new land designations made for conservation. DRECP officials revealed to CalWEA that, indeed, preserving high-quality wind resource areas was simply not an objective of the planning effort.

In applying wind energy exclusions, moreover, the DRECP did not specifically evaluate site-specific conditions for the potential compatibility of wind energy with other DRECP objectives. The Plan did not take into consideration the fact that wind energy projects cause limited ground disturbance and are inherently flexible, allowing careful micro-siting of turbines to avoid potential impacts. This siting flexibility and small footprint makes wind energy inherently compatible with BLM’s multiple-use goals, such as providing corridors for imperiled wildlife and backcountry recreation and protecting sensitive vegetation and habitat areas. Conflict was presumed, not demonstrated.

CalWEA also highlights the fact that the proposed plan amendments would not add acreage to the Development Focus Areas where permitting was ostensibly streamlined (in fact, the amendments would reduce DFA acreage). Rather, it would remove categorical prohibitions against renewable energy development, enabling site-specific study to determine whether development is compatible with other land uses and conservation objectives. According to the BLM’s January 13, 2021, press statement, its proposal would add over 800,000 acres for renewable energy exploration and potential development, roughly double the area of the DFAs. Together with the DFAs, the total area would still represent just 12 percent of the 10.8 million acres managed by the BLM. Only a fraction of that would likely be developed, given the numerous considerations that go into successful renewable energy projects.

For all the above reasons, CalWEA strongly urges the Biden Administration to carefully consider whether the proposed amendments are warranted to enable wind energy development or should be adjusted to achieve Biden Administration and California goals to eliminate our country’s dependence on carbon-based fuels and avoid the most catastrophic impacts of climate change. I would welcome the opportunity to discuss our perspective.

Sincerely,



Nancy Rader
Executive Director

cc: Janea Scott, Counselor to the Secretary
David Hayes, Special Assistant to the President for Climate Policy
Wade Crowfoot, Natural Resources Secretary, State of California
David Hochschild, Chair, Energy Commission, State of California
Karen Douglas, Commissioner, Energy Commission, State of California
Alice Reynolds, Senior Advisor for Energy, Office of Governor Gavin Newsom
