

Desert Harvest Solar Project

Final Environmental Impact Statement and

Proposed California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment

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United States
Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Palm Springs Field Office
Palm Springs, CA



Cover Photo: View of the solar facility site from Kaiser Road

**Desert Harvest Solar Project
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and
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Area Plan Amendment**

Prepared by
U.S. Department of the Interior
Bureau of Land Management
Palm Springs–South Coast Field Office
Palm Springs, California

ABSTRACT

DESERT HARVEST SOLAR PROJECT

Final Environmental Impact Statement and Proposed CDCA Plan Amendment

Lead Agency: U.S. Bureau of Land Management

Cooperating Agency: U.S. National Park Service, County of Riverside

California Environmental Quality Act Lead Agency: County of Riverside

Title: EDF Desert Harvest Solar Project, Riverside County, California

Contact: Mr. Frank McMenimen, Palm Springs/South Coast Field Office, 1201 Bird Center Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92262

Web Site:

http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings/Solar_Projects/Desert_Harvest_Solar_Project.html

Public Review Period and CDCA Plan Amendment Protest Period: November 2, 2012 to December 3, 2012

Instruction for Lodging a Protest:

http://www.blm.gov/pgdata/content/wo/en/prog/planning/planning_overview/protest_resolution.html

Abstract: This Environmental Impact Statement addresses the U.S. Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) consideration of issuance of a right-of-way grant to EDF Renewable Energy for the construction, operation, maintenance, and decommissioning of a 150- megawatt photovoltaic solar energy facility and generation-intertie transmission line (gen-tie line). The project would be located in Riverside County, California, near the unincorporated community of Desert Center on land administered by the BLM.

The Environmental Impact Statement analyzes seven solar facility alternatives and five gen-tie line alternatives. The solar facility alternatives are designated as follows: (1) No Action (No Plan Amendment), in which the application would be denied and current management of the site would be maintained; (2) the application would be denied and the CDCA Plan would be amended to declare the site suitable for solar energy development; (3) the application would be denied and the CDCA Plan would be amended to declare the site unsuitable for solar energy development; (4) BLM would grant the Applicant a right-of-way (ROW) for the project as proposed; (5) BLM would grant the Applicant a ROW for the project excluding the 47-acre portion of the site that is within the Palen-Ford Wildlife Habitat Management Area; (6) BLM would grant the Applicant a ROW for the project excluding the 155-acre southern parcel of the project and a 9-acre portion of the northern parcel that contains a sensitive plant species; (7) BLM would grant the Applicant a ROW as described under Alternative 6, but with taller solar panels. Gen-tie alternatives are designated as follows: (A) No Gen-Tie, in which the gen-tie line would not be constructed and current management of the site would be maintained; (B) The gen-tie line would be approved and would share transmission towers with the approved Desert Sunlight Solar Farm (DSSF); (C) The gen-tie line would be constructed on separate towers parallel to DSSF towers; (D) The gen-tie line would be constructed in a different, slightly shorter alignment; (E) The gen-tie line would be constructed in a different, slightly shorter alignment on a larger proportion of BLM land than Alternative D. Alternatives 4 through 7 and B through E would require an amendment to the CDCA Plan to find the project area suitable for solar development and allow a high-voltage transmission line outside of a federally designated utility corridor.

The proposed project or any of the action alternatives is anticipated to result in substantial adverse effects to air resources from emissions of particulate matter (PM10), volatile organic compounds (VOC), carbon monoxide (CO), and oxides of nitrogen (NOx); substantial adverse effects to biological resources, including vegetation habitat, special-status plants, habitat fragmentation, and displacement of wildlife; adverse effects to historic properties; substantial adverse cumulative effects to lands and realty from large-scale land conversion; substantial adverse noise effects from an increase in traffic-related noise levels along Kaiser Road; and substantial adverse effects to visual resources and recreation, due to degradation of the visual character of the landscape.



United States Department of the Interior

BUREAU OF LAND MANAGEMENT

Palm Springs – South Coast Field Office

1201 Bird Center Drive

Palm Springs, CA 92262

www.ca.blm.gov



In Reply Refer To:
2830-03 (P)
CAC-049491
CAD000.06/CAD060

Dear Reader:

Attached for your review and comment is the Final Environmental Impact Statement / Proposed California Desert Conservation Area Plan Amendment (Final EIS / Proposed CDCA Plan Amendment) for the Desert Harvest Solar Project for the California Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Palm Springs-South Coast Field Office. The BLM prepared this document in accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA), as amended, the Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA), implementing regulations, the BLM's Land Use Planning Handbook (H-1601-1), and other applicable law and policy.

The Applicant's proposed Desert Harvest Solar Project, a 150-megawatt solar photovoltaic facility would be sited on 1,208 acres of BLM-managed lands north of the community of Desert Center in Riverside County, California. An associated 220-kilovolt generation-intertie transmission line would be sited within a 204-acre right-of-way on BLM-managed land and 52 acres of non-BLM managed land, which would extend from the solar facility site to the planned Red Bluff Substation. The Final EIS / Proposed CDCA Plan Amendment and supporting information are available on the project web site at: http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/fo/palmsprings/Solar_Projects/Desert_Harvest_Solar_Project.html

The BLM encourages the public to provide information and comments pertaining to the analysis presented in the Final EIS / Proposed CDCA Plan Amendment. Comments will be accepted for thirty (30) calendar days following the Environmental Protection Agency's publication of its Notice of Availability in the *Federal Register*. Announcement will also be made through the local news media. The BLM can best use your comments and resource information submissions if received within the review period. BLM's resource management planning regulations at 43 CFR 1610.5-2 specify the required elements for filing a timely protest. The BLM must resolve any protests on the proposed plan amendment before issuing a decision. If no changes to the Final EIS are warranted based on the comments, the BLM will prepare a Record of Decision (ROD) that documents the selected alternative and specific mitigation measures.

Comments may be submitted electronically at: cad desertharvest@blm.gov. Comments may also be submitted by mail to: Frank McMenimen, Palm Springs/South Coast Field Office, 1201 Bird Center Drive, Palm Springs, CA 92262. To facilitate analysis of comments and information submitted, we strongly encourage you to submit comments in an electronic format.

Your review of and comments on the content of this document are critical to the success of this planning effort, and we request that you make your comments as specific as possible. Please include suggested changes, sources, or methodologies and reference a section or page number whenever possible.

Before including your address, phone number, e-mail address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, be advised that your entire comment, including your personal identifying information, may be made publicly available at any time. While you can ask us in your comment to withhold your personal identifying information from public review, we cannot guarantee that we will be able to do so.

Copies of the Final EIS / Proposed CDCA Plan Amendment have been sent to affected federal, State, and local government agencies, as well as affected Tribal governments. The following BLM offices have copies available for public inspection: the BLM California Desert District, 22835 Calle San Juan De Los Lagos, Moreno Valley, CA 92553; the BLM Palm Springs/South Coast Field Office (see address above); and the BLM California State Office, 2800 Cottage Way, Sacramento, California 95825.

Thank you for your continued interest in the Final EIS / Proposed CDCA Plan Amendment. We appreciate the information and suggestions you contribute to the planning process. For additional information or clarification regarding this document or the planning process, please contact Frank McMenimen, Project Manager, at the BLM Palm Springs/South Coast Field office at 760.833.7150, or email fmcmenimen@blm.gov.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John R. Kalish". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

John R. Kalish
Field Manager