



# SAN GORGONIO CHAPTER

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*Regional Groups Serving Riverside and San Bernardino Counties: Big Bear,  
Los Serranos, Mojave, Moreno Valley, Mountains, Santa Margarita, Tahquitz.*

March 24, 2009

California Energy Commission  
Dockets Office, MS-4  
1516 Ninth Street  
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

**DOCKET**

**09-RENEW EO-1**

DATE MAR 24 2009

RECD. MAR 25 2009

**Re: Renewable Energy Executive Order (Dockets No. 09--Renew E0--01)**

Dear Commission Members:

The San Gorgonio Chapter of the Sierra Club welcomes the opportunity to assist the California Energy Commission (CEC), the California Department of Fish and Game (DFG), and the cooperating agencies to identify issues that should be addressed in the implementation of Executive Order S-14-08 and to propose corresponding solutions.

We applaud the State of California's leadership in establishing goals and policies to increase renewable energy generation and to reduce greenhouse gas emissions. The target set by Governor Schwarzenegger in the Renewable Energy Executive Order for all retail sellers of electricity within California to serve 33 percent of their electric load with renewable energy by 2020 is a further index of that leadership. Achieving that target through both coordinated natural resource conservation planning and expedited renewable-energy permitting will be a challenge, however, in that there is an inherent conflict between the stated objectives. Accordingly, we would like to share two concerns and propose an avenue for addressing these concerns.

We are apprehensive that the protection of California's natural resources -- especially protection of the unique biological resources of the Mojave Desert -- will be given less priority than it deserves and that the law requires as the State rushes to site renewable energy facilities under the Executive Order S-14-08 process. Some might argue that the Executive Order is designed to avoid this by directing the CEC and DFG to collaborate. Yet there is no denying that the emphasis of the Executive Order is on the rapid siting of renewable energy facilities. Our concern is that the protection of biologically sensitive lands will ultimately become a secondary consideration.

We are concerned, as well, that the Executive Order's directive to use the Natural Community Conservation Planning (NCCP) tool to facilitate renewable energy generation may place threatened and endangered species at further risk. The danger is that the region-wide view of the NCCP tool is too large to provide any meaningful protection for special-status species on any given energy facility. In fact, there is reason to wonder whether the selection of the NCCP tool is designed to permit the sacrifice of protected species in the name of some more nebulous "natural community." The Executive Order's mandate to initiate a Desert Renewable Energy

Conservation Plan (DRECP) is of particular concern given the Plan's focus on the Mojave and Colorado desert regions. The implication is that it is acceptable for public agencies to forego protecting some portion of the special status species within the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation area.

To be proactive, we propose that (a) the renewable energy facilities needed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions be sited on already disturbed lands and (b) those projects electing to site on disturbed private lands receive priority for processing under Section 10 of the Endangered Species Act. By siting on disturbed lands, much, if not all, of the damage to the biological resources of the desert that will occur if the CEC proceeds to site renewable energy facilities on pristine public lands would be avoided. The conservation community in Southern California in 2008 began the process of identifying disturbed lands within the California Desert Conservation Area, and we are confident that there are more than sufficient disturbed lands to meet the solar generation portion of California's Renewable Portfolio Standard goal of 33 percent by 2020. We would be delighted to provide you with a map of the disturbed areas. At the CEC workshop on March 17 in Palm Springs, Darrin Thome of the Fish and Wildlife Service clearly documented the situation with regard to Section 10 permit processing.

The BrightSource Energy application to site a solar facility in the Ivanpah Valley is a case in point regarding the advantages of siting on disturbed lands. The essential conclusion of the Preliminary Staff Assessment (PSA) is that the construction of Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System would result in extensive and negative impacts on the habitat, wildlife, and plants of the Ivanpah Valley. The impacts of the Ivanpah project would be cumulatively considerable as well, given other reasonably foreseeable projects affecting the same resources. These negative effects could be avoided by siting the facility on the private lands around Daggett identified in the Alternatives section of the PSA. With scalable solar technologies available today, projects can be sited on smaller parcels instead of the vast acreages claimed as necessary by proponents of older technologies.

In closing, I want to compliment the CEC and DFG for the informative workshop of March 17 on the implementation of renewable energy executive order. The session was well organized and informative.

Sincerely,

Sidney Silliman  
Energy Chair

....To explore, enjoy and preserve the nation's forests, waters, wildlife, and wilderness.