



DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

Bureau of Land Management

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Notice of Availability of the Draft Desert Plan Amendment and Draft Environmental Impact Statement, California

AGENCY: Bureau of Land Management, Interior.

ACTION: Notice of availability.

SUMMARY: In accordance with the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969, as amended, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has prepared a Draft Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) and Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), for an amendment to the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan and the Bakersfield and Bishop Resource Management Plans (RMPs). The Desert Plan Amendment Draft LUPA/EIS includes consideration of changes to the management or modification to the boundaries of 129 Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs). By this notice, the BLM is announcing the availability of the Draft LUPA/EIS. In order to comply with Federal regulations, the BLM is also announcing a comment period on proposed changes to the ACECs within the planning area.

DATES: To ensure that comments will be considered, the BLM must receive written comments on the Draft LUPA/ EIS within 90 days following the date the Environmental Protection Agency publishes its notice of the Draft LUPA/EIS in the Federal Register. The BLM will announce future meetings and any other public participation activities at least 15 days in advance through public notices, news releases, and/or mailings.

ADDRESSES: The Desert Plan Amendment Draft LUPA/EIS are available on the BLM ePlanning project website at <https://go.usa.gov/x7hdj>. Click the “Documents” link on the

left side of the screen to find the electronic version of these materials. Hard copies of the Desert Plan Amendment Draft LUPA and Draft EIS are also available for public inspection at the following BLM locations:

California State Office, 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623, Sacramento, CA 95825;

California Desert District Office, 22835 Calle San Juan De Los Lagos, Moreno Valley, CA 92553;

Barstow Field Office, 2601 Barstow Road, Barstow, CA 92311;

El Centro Field Office, 1661 S. 4th Street, El Centro, CA 92243;

Needles Field Office, 1303 S. Highway 95, Needles, CA 92363;

Ridgecrest Field Office, 300 S. Richmond Road, Ridgecrest, CA 93555;

Bakersfield Field Office, 3801 Pegasus Drive, Bakersfield, CA 93308; and

Bishop Field Office, 351 Pacu Lane, Suite 100, Bishop, CA 93514.

You may submit written comments related to the Desert Plan Amendment by either of the following methods:

- Website: <https://go.usa.gov/x7hdj>
- Mail: Bureau of Land Management, California State Office, Attn: Desert Plan Amendment, 2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623, Sacramento, CA 95825

FOR FURTHER INFORMATION CONTACT: Jeremiah Karuzas, Renewable Energy Program Manager, telephone: 916-978-4644, email: jkaruzas@blm.gov; address Bureau of Land Management, 2800 Cottage Way, W-1623, Sacramento, CA 95825.

Persons who use a telecommunications device for the deaf (TDD) may call the Federal Relay Service (FRS) at 1-800-877-8339 to contact Mr. Karuzas during normal business hours. The FRS is available 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, to leave a message or question. You will receive a reply during normal business hours.

SUPPLEMENTARY INFORMATION: In September 2016, the BLM issued a Record of Decision (ROD) for the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) LUPA, which amended the CDCA Plan, the Bishop RMP, and the Bakersfield RMP in the Mojave and Colorado/Sonoran Desert regions of southern California. The 2016 ROD was intended to address the streamlining of renewable energy development, conservation of desert resources, and to support multiple use and recreation on the nearly 11 million acres of BLM-managed public land in the planning area. In response to challenges that arose with the implementation of the 2016 DRECP LUPA, as well as in response to Executive Order 13783, Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth, and Executive Order 13821 on Streamlining and Expediting Requests to Locate Broadband Facilities in Rural America, the BLM published a Notice of Intent in the Federal Register on February 2, 2018 (83 FR 4921) initiating a 45-day public comment period. The BLM sought comments on:

- The potential impacts that land use designations contained in the amended Land Use Plans will have on commercial-scale renewable energy projects, including wind, solar and geothermal energy;
- ACECs that were designated, including where private lands lie within the external boundaries of such designations, as well as comments on increasing opportunities for increased renewable energy development, recreational and off-highway vehicle access, mining access, and grazing; and
- The impact that land-use designations, land-disturbance limits (“disturbance caps”), and visual-management classifications contained in the plans may have on the deployment of future communications infrastructure.

The BLM used public scoping comments to help identify planning issues to formulate alternatives and frame the scope of analysis in the Draft LUPA/EIS. Issues considered in the Draft LUPA/EIS are management actions associated with conservation areas,

biological resources (including special status species), cultural resources, renewable energy, minerals, livestock grazing, visual resources, air resources, water resources, and recreation. The LUPA also considers decisions regarding ACECs, California Desert National Conservation Lands (CDNCL), and management of lands with wilderness characteristics. The Desert Plan Amendment Draft LUPA/EIS evaluates the No Action Alternative and two action alternatives (Alternatives 1 and 2). The BLM identifies Alternative 1 as the Preferred Alternative. This alternative, however, does not represent the final agency direction. After the public comment period closes, the BLM will prepare a Proposed LUPA, which may reflect changes or adjustments based on information received during public comment on the Draft LUPA/EIS, new information, or changes in BLM policies or priorities.

The No Action Alternative would retain the decisions specified in the 2016 ROD for the DRECP LUPA, as recently modified by Public Law 116-9. Alternative 1 would reduce the number of ACECs from 129 to 97 thus reducing the acreage of the ACECs by approximately 1.8 million acres; reduce the areas identified as CDNCL by approximately 2.2 million acres; and result in an additional 450,000 acres of General Public Lands (GPL). Alternative 1 would also modify or eliminate 68 Conservation Management Actions (CMAs), which would also change the manner in which disturbance caps are implemented, including elimination of disturbance caps in CDNCL, as well as allowing renewable energy development in Special Recreation Management Areas (SRMA).

Alternative 2 would reduce the number of ACECs to 100, and reduce the acreage of the ACECs by approximately 1.5 million acres; reduce the areas identified as CDNCL by approximately 2.1 million acres; and result in an additional approximate 274,000 acres of General Public Lands (GPL). Alternative 2 would also modify or eliminate the same 68 CMAs, which would also change the manner in which disturbance caps are implemented similar to Alternative 1 but Alternative 2 would retain the one percent disturbance cap for

CDNCL. Alternative 2 CMAs would be modified to only allow renewable energy development in a SRMA where there is overlap with Development Focus Areas (DFAs). All other land use allocation decisions and CMAs from the 2016 ROD would be retained in both Alternative 1 and Alternative 2.

As a result of proposed CMA changes, the resource use limitations of the 129 ACECs within the planning area will also change. Therefore, pursuant to 43 CFR 1610.7–2(b), this notice announces a concurrent public comment period on proposed management changes (including alteration or elimination of disturbance caps), and boundary modifications or elimination of the existing ACECs as identified in Table 1.

Table 1. ACECs proposed for boundary modification or elimination.

ACEC Name	No Action Acres	Alternative 1 Acres	Alternative 2 Acres
Afton Canyon	8,800	8,800	8,800
Alligator Rock	6,800	6,200	6,200
Amargosa North	114,000	72,760	72,760
Amargosa South	148,410	134,410	134,410
Amboy Crater	640	640	640
Avawatz Mountains WSA	49,900	0	0
Ayers Rock	1,500	1,500	1,500
Barstow Woolly Sunflower	19,100	19,100	19,100
Bedrock Spring	440	0	0
Bendire’s Thrasher	9,800	9,800	9,800
Big Morongo Canyon	25,000	24, 600	24, 600
Big Rock Creek Wash	310	310	310
Bigelow Cholla	4,200	4,200	4,200

ACEC Name	No Action Acres	Alternative 1 Acres	Alternative 2 Acres
Black Mountain	51,300	0	0
Brisbane Valley Monkey Flower	11,700	11,700	11,700
Bristol	213,600	116,400	116,400
Cadiz Valley	191,200	67,600	67,600
Cady Mountains WSA	101,400	0	101,400
Calico Early Man Site	840	840	840
Carbonate Endemic Plants RNA	5,000	5,000	5,000
Castle Mountain	3,180	0	0
Cerro Gordo	10,400	9,700	9,700
Cerro Gordo WSA	630	0	0
Chemehuevi	864,200	578,600	578,600
Chuckwalla	512,300	319,400	319,400
Chuckwalla to Chemehuevi tortoise linkage	318,600	269,900	269,900
Chuckwalla Valley Dune Thicket	2,200	2,200	2,200
Coachella Valley Fringe-toed Lizard	10,300	10,300	10,300
Conglomerate Mesa	1,700	1,700	1,700
Coolgardie Mesa	9,800	9,800	9,800
Corn Springs	2,500	900	900
Coyote Mountains Fossil Site	5,900	5,900	5,900
Cronese Basin	8,500	0	0
Dagget Ridge Monkey Flower	26,100	26,100	26,100
Dead Mountains	27,200	0	0

ACEC Name	No Action Acres	Alternative 1 Acres	Alternative 2 Acres
Death Valley 17 WSA	20,600	0	0
Denning Springs	390	0	0
Desert Lily Preserve	2,100	2,100	2,100
Desert Tortoise Research Natural Area	22,200	22,200	22,200
Dos Palmas	8,600	8,600	8,600
Eagles Flyway	10,900	0	0
East Mesa	88,500	38,200	88,500
El Paso to Golden	57,800	57,800	57,800
Fossil Falls	1,700	1,700	1,700
Fremont-Kramer	236,000	236,000	236,000
Granite Mountain Corridor	39,300	0	34,500
Great Falls Basin	10,300	0	0
Halloran Wash	1,700	1,700	1,700
Harper Dry Lake	490	490	490
Horse Canyon	1,500	1,500	1,500
Independence Creek WSA	6,500	0	0
Indian Pass	1,900	1,900	1,900
Ivanpah	78,600	63,900	78,600
Jawbone/Butterbredt	145,700	114,900	114,900
Juniper Flats	2,400	2,400	2,400
Kingston Range	18,900	15,200	15,200
Kingston Range WSA	40,000	0	0

ACEC Name	No Action Acres	Alternative 1 Acres	Alternative 2 Acres
Lake Cahuilla	8,600	8,600	8,600
Lake Cahuilla Shoreline	11,900	11,900	11,900
Last Chance Canyon	5,100	3,500	3,500
Manix	2,900	2,900	2,900
Manzanar	540	540	540
Marble Mountain Fossil Bed	230	0	0
McCoy Valley	26,200	26,200	26,200
McCoy Wash	6,400	6,400	6,400
Mesquite Hills/Crucero	5,000	5,000	5,000
Mesquite Lake	6,800	6,800	6,800
Middle Knob	17,800	17,800	17,800
Mohave Ground Squirrel	165,200	170,800	170,800
Mojave Fishhook Cactus	637	635	635
Mojave Fringe-toed Lizard	22,500	11,500	11,500
Mopah Spring	1,900	0	0
Mountain Pass Dinosaur Trackway	630	630	630
Mule McCoy Linkage	51,200	51,200	51,200
Mule Mountains	4,100	4,100	4,100
Northern Lucerne Wildlife Linkage	21,900	21,900	21,900
Ocotillo	14,600	14,600	14,600
Olancha Greasewood	25,600	19,500	19,500
Old Woman Springs Wildlife Linkage	55,600	43,200	55,600

ACEC Name	No Action Acres	Alternative 1 Acres	Alternative 2 Acres
Ord-Rodman	195,300	140,700	140,700
Owens Lake	10,200	10,200	10,200
Palen Dry Lake	3,600	3,600	3,600
Palen Ford	41,400	25,600	41,400
Panamint Lake	21,700	0	0
Panamints and Argus	102,900	71,500	71,500
Parish's Phacelia	560	560	560
Patton Military Camps	16,400	21,100	21,100
Picacho	183,500	133,600	133,600
Pilot Knob	860	860	860
Pinto Mountains	108,200	84,200	84,200
Pipes Canyon	8,700	4,600	4,600
Pisgah	46,600	46,600	46,600
Piute-Fenner	155,500	146,200	146,200
Plank Road	420	420	420
Rainbow Basin/Owl Canyon	4,100	4,100	4,100
Red Mountain Spring	700	700	700
Rodman Mountains Cultural Area	6,200	0	0
Rose Spring	840	840	840
Saline Valley	1,400	0	0
Salt Creek Hills	2,200	1,600	1,600
Salton Sea Hazardous ACEC	5,100	5,100	5,100

ACEC Name	No Action Acres	Alternative 1 Acres	Alternative 2 Acres
San Sebastian Marsh/San Felipe Creek	6,600	6,600	6,600
Sand Canyon	2,600	0	0
Santos Manuel	27,500	0	0
Shadow Valley	197,300	159,700	159,700
Short Canyon	750	0	0
Sierra Canyons	26,300	27,000	27,000
Singer Geoglyphs	2,000	2,000	2,000
Soda Mountains Expansion	16,700	0	0
Soda Mountains WSA	88,800	0	0
Soda Mountains	0	0	33,300
Soggy Dry Lake Creosote Rings	180	180	180
Southern Inyo WSA	2,700	0	0
Steam Well	40	0	0
Superior-Cronese	315,800	310,900	310,900
Surprise Canyon	4,600	0	0
Symmec Creek WSA	8,400	0	0
Trona Pinnacles	4,100	4,100	4,100
Turtle Mountains	50,400	0	0
Upper Johnson Valley Yucca Rings	330	330	330
Upper McCoy	37,400	37,400	37,400
Warm Sulfur Springs	350	350	350
West Mesa	82,500	18,700	82,500

ACEC Name	No Action Acres	Alternative 1 Acres	Alternative 2 Acres
West Paradise	240	0	0
Western Rand Mountains	30,400	30,400	30,400
Whipple Mountains	2,800	2,100	2,100
White Mountain City	820	820	820
White Mountains WSA	1,600	0	0
Whitewater Canyon	14,900	2,800	2,800
Yuha Basin	77,300	73,600	73,600

A more detailed description of all proposed ACEC modifications, including maps, is included in the Draft LUPA/EIS and Appendix B of the Draft LUPA/EIS.

The BLM will utilize and coordinate the NEPA process to help fulfill the public involvement process under the National Historic Preservation Act (54 U.S.C. 306108), as provided in 36 CFR 800.2(d)(3). The BLM will continue to consult with Indian tribes on a government-to-government basis, in accordance with Executive Order 13175 and other policies. Tribal concerns, including impacts on Indian trust assets and potential impacts to cultural resources, will continue to be given due consideration. Federal, State, and local agencies, along with tribes and other stakeholders that may be interested in or affected by the proposed action that the BLM is evaluating, are invited to participate in the comment period.

Please note that public comments and information submitted, including names, street addresses, and email addresses of persons who submit comments, will be available for public review and disclosure at the BLM California State Office (see **ADDRESSES**) during regular business hours (8 a.m. to 4 p.m.), Monday through Friday, except holidays.

Before including your address, phone number, email address, or other personal identifying information in your comment, you should be aware 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.

(Authority: 40 CFR 1506.6, 40 CFR 1506.10)

Karen E. Mouritsen,

State Director, California.

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