

U.S. government releases draft of Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan

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The state of California and U.S. federal officials have released the latest draft of their plan for renewable energy in the California desert, which environmentalists say does not go far enough to protect biologically sensitive areas.

On Tuesday the U.S. Department of the Interior released the Draft Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) for public review. This is the latest step for the plan, in a process which has lasted six years so far and covers land use in 89,000 square kilometers of both private and public lands in the California desert.

The plan seeks to identify appropriate areas for renewable energy development and to set aside other



The plan covers 89,000 square kilometers of the California desert.
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areas for wildlife, cultural and recreational uses, and is a collaborative effort between state of California and federal agencies.

These agencies have approved 17 renewable energy projects in lands covered by the DRECP since the process began, for a total of 4.8 GW. This includes the Ivanpah CSP project, which has been sharply criticized by environmentalists, who are also fighting the proposed Palen CSP project.

The plan seeks to avoid such future conflicts, and lays out six alternative scenarios including one where siting approvals continue unchanged on a project-by-project basis. Conservation groups are far from satisfied with the plan's "Preferred Alternative", which sets aside 8,000 square kilometers for renewable energy development and another 740 square kilometers of "variance lands".

"It appears to have extremely expansive development areas which are not well thought through," Center for Biological Diversity Lead Attorney Lisa Belenky told PV Magazine. "Leaving in a lot of gray areas is not really a positive thing in our view."