

**DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE
NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL
THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY**

July 1, 2010

Ms. Edythe Seehafer
Bureau of Land Management
Barstow Field Office
2601 Barstow Road
Barstow, CA 92311

Via fax: 760.252.6098 and email: GraniteWindProject@blm.gov

Re: Draft Environmental Impact Statement/Environmental Impact Report
for the Granite Mountain Wind Energy Project (DES 10-11)

Dear Ms. Seehafer:

This letter constitutes the comments on the above-captioned proposed wind project and draft environmental impact statement/environmental impact report (hereinafter referred to as the DEIS) of the Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), The Wilderness Society (TWS), and Defenders of Wildlife, all national environmental membership organizations with long histories of advocacy on behalf of the lands and resources administered by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM). More recently these organizations have been intensively involved in the Bureau's work to develop comprehensive renewable energy programs for the public lands as well as its efforts to "fast track" the permitting of individual renewable energy projects in California so that they may be eligible for grant funding under the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

Introduction. Our organizations recognize the need to develop the nation's renewable energy resources and to do so rapidly in order to respond effectively to the challenge of climate change. Unique natural resources here in California are already being affected by climate change, including, for example, the pikas of Yosemite National Park and the Joshua trees in Joshua Tree National Park. We also recognize that renewable energy development can help create jobs in communities that are eager for them, because of the nation's economic crisis. For these and other related reasons, our organizations are working with regulators and project proponents to move renewable energy projects forward. That said, renewable development is not appropriate everywhere on the public lands and must be balanced against the equally urgent need to protect unique and sensitive resources of the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA). California is lucky indeed that we have sufficient renewable resources, including wind resources, throughout the State¹ to do their development in an environmentally and fiscally sensitive way.

As we and our colleagues at sister organizations have repeatedly stated, the best way to develop the renewable resources of the CDCA is through comprehensive, pro-active planning by both the federal government and the state to identify the most appropriate areas for such development --

¹ California's Renewable Energy Transition Initiative found, for example, that the state potentially could access 500 GW of renewable energy, an order of magnitude greater than the state's peak demand and far beyond the ability of our electric grid to handle, although not all of this potential resource is located in environmentally desirable places.

i.e., development zones -- and to guide development to those zones. *See, e.g.*, letter dated June 29, 2009 to Interior Secretary Salazar and California's Governor Schwarzenegger and signed by 11 organizations, including our own, attached as Exhibit 1.

We support the BLM's adoption of zone designation for its forthcoming solar programmatic EIS because of the benefits inherent in this approach, including but not limited to clustering development of large-scale projects in appropriate places, rather than permitting them to be located across the landscape in numerous locations. We urge the Bureau to use this same approach for wind projects here in California (and elsewhere) – ideally in connection with the forthcoming Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) which, as you may already know, will designate not only renewable energy development zones, but also zones for conservation. In addition, the DRECP will include a comprehensive mitigation strategy. The integration and completion of these efforts offers the promise of a balanced plan that will facilitate development of renewable resources in the Desert while protecting desert resources.

Despite our fundamental belief in the critical importance of agency-guided development of renewable energy, rather than developer-initiated development, we have, as indicated, been investing a great deal of time and effort into the fast track projects. We have done so in response to the emphasis the Department, the BLM and the developers place on meeting ARRA deadlines as well as the potential role these projects could play in meeting the renewable generation and economic goals of the state and federal governments. We have also done so because we wanted to make the projects as environmentally sensitive as they can be and because we wanted to ensure, to the extent possible, that their accompanying environmental documents are as sound as they can be. It is now apparent to us that not even the best of the environmental documents being produced for the fast track projects and/or the best projects should be models or precedents for the future. Regrettably, as written, neither this DEIS nor this project is a candidate for either of those categories.

We had high hopes for this DEIS. Unlike the case with large-scale solar proposals, the BLM has some experience permitting wind projects. In addition, as the DEIS points out, the agency has the benefit of a completed programmatic environmental impact statement for wind development – which is also not the case with large-scale solar projects. What is more, the agency opted to prepare a full environmental impact statement in recognition of the need to address site-specific issues and impacts that were not covered in the programmatic EIS, DEIS at 1-2, as well as because that document's cumulative impacts analysis had been overtaken by events, namely the proliferation of renewable energy proposals in the region, *id.* at 1-3, 3-2. And, because the BLM determined to prepare this document jointly with the County, we had hoped that it would be a positive example of the benefits of consolidated environmental review which we have in fact advocated as a means of accelerating project approval without sacrificing environmental protections.² The DEIS, however, suffers from a number of serious inadequacies, including several that are shared by the fast-track utility scale solar projects the BLM is reviewing now such as its treatment of alternatives and its analyses of impacts, both cumulative and direct. And, as the result of DEIS' inadequacies, it is impossible to evaluate the costs and benefits of the proposed project.

² The document is indeed “to serve the requirements of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) and the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) for the Proposed Project and alternatives.” DEIS at 1-1. As will be apparent, these comments focus on its compliance with the requirements of NEPA.

The Granite Mountain Wind Project

Our groups and sister organizations have affirmatively advocated that certain areas be prioritized for renewable energy development. Criteria we have promoted for identification of those areas include the following: lands that have been mechanically disturbed; lands of comparatively low resource value located adjacent to degraded and impacted private lands on the fringes of the California Desert Conservation Area; brownfields; locations adjacent to urbanized areas; and locations that minimize the need to build new infrastructure such as roads and substations. The overall goal of these criteria is to steer projects to areas with comparatively low potential for conflict and controversy in order to facilitate their timely development. Regrettably, this project meets few of these criteria.

For example, the public lands area of this project has no buildings or other structure on it, DEIS at 1, 5, and is “undeveloped and relatively undisturbed ... with limited public access to the area, id. at 3-85. Although the project would be on both public and private lands, no information is provided about resource conditions on those private lands while the information provided about resources on public lands is problematic.

The DEIS’ description of the affected environment is based on a report contained in Appendix F, “Draft Biological Resources Report Granite Mountain Wind Energy Project, San Bernardino County, California (Tetra Tech [TtEC] 2009).” We are concerned about the quality of the draft version of the report for a variety of reasons, including absence of focused on-ground surveys necessary to document the occurrence of Desert Bighorn in the Granite Mountains and the lack of field surveys in 2010 for rare plants, such as the Mojave monkeyflower and Panamint cymopterus, and Ford’s Indra Swallowtail Butterfly, which is dependent on its host plant, the Panamint cymopterus. Spring surveys for rare plants and desert tortoises have been required for all proposed solar energy projects in the California Desert because of the abnormally high amount of winter precipitation received during the late winter period. Such high precipitation in the desert environment typically results in significant increases in plant and animal occurrence and abundance. Such surveys should have been required for the proposed Granite Mountain wind project as well.

Our concern over lack of biological field surveys for rare plants in the spring of 2010 is supported by the following statement contained in the DEIS regarding the Mojave monkeyflower: “The Mojave monkeyflower (BLM sensitive) blooms between April and June, and the amount and timing of precipitation is most likely a significant factor that facilitates germination. It is possible that the BSA did not receive adequate spring rainfall to promote germination prior to surveys, and thus this species would not have been identifiable during surveys.” DEIS at 3-93.

Contrary to information in the DEIS at page 3-81, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) has developed regulations to implement the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act.³ Golden eagle surveys for proposed solar energy projects in the California Desert have been required of project applicants by the USFWS and BLM in 2010. Applicants were required to perform protocol surveys for this species as part of the application process for obtaining an incidental take permit. There is no evidence in the DEIS that the applicant has applied for an incidental take permit for Golden eagles. Equally importantly, the Golden eagle is a “fully protected” species under state law, California Fish & Game Code §§ 3511), and thus may not be taken or possessed – a fact which the DEIS itself does not seem to acknowledge.

³ See <http://www.fws.gov/migratorybirds/baldeagle.htm>.

Notwithstanding these shortcomings of the DEIS, there are clearly significant resources in the project area. For example, the Granite Mountains have been designated by BLM as a “Key Raptor Area” (KRA): this KRA “is recognized by the BLM as important for nesting, migrating or wintering habitat...” DEIS at 3-85. In addition, there is an Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) for the Bendire’s thrasher within the site and, although no turbines will be placed within that ACEC, an existing route through it will be upgraded,⁴ if the project goes forward. *Id.* at 3-197.⁵ On the plus side,

[n]o other ACECs are located within the Proposed Project area. There are no Wilderness Areas, Desert Wildlife Management Areas, or USFWS Critical Habitat areas within the Proposed Project area.

Id. at 3-85. Additionally, although the area contains potential desert tortoise habitat, *id.* at 3-99, very few desert tortoise were found during 2007 and 2008 surveys, *id.* at 3-98, although as noted above, no surveys for this species were conducted during 2009 or since.

Golden eagles occur in the project area and nesting has been documented near it. DEIS at 3-89 (Table 3.4-B). Other species may also occur, including Mojave monkeyflower, a BLM sensitive species, and Panamint cymopterus, and its obligate, the Ford’s Indra swallowtail butterfly. *See, e.g., id.* at 3-93, 3-94. Moreover, construction of a new substation and a new access road would be required, *id.* at 2, although it appears that the work force required for both project construction and operation could be accommodated nearby, *see, e.g., id.* at 4-6.

Our principal concerns about the project at this time relate to the biological resources that may be affected by it. As indicated above, the information in the DEIS is inadequate to confirm the presence or absence of key species, including in particular, the Mojave monkeyflower, the Ford’s Indra swallowtail butterfly and Nelson’s bighorn sheep. Conditions were not favorable for germination of former during the time that surveys were done for that species and there is no evidence that re-surveys were done when they were while it appears that *no* surveys were done to determine the presence or absence of bighorn.

Bighorn sheep are often difficult to detect especially in ranges like the Granite Mountains where there may be a very low number of individuals. *See, e.g.,* California Energy Commission, Blythe Solar Power Plant Revised Staff Assessment at C.2-38. In lieu of surveys for bighorn, this DEIS relies on the assertion that “[n]o bighorn sheep or sign were detected incidentally or during wildlife surveys and no records from the CNDDDB were found for this species in the project vicinity; therefore it is unlikely that this species is present within the WRA,” DEIS at 3-90 (Table 3.4-B), despite the obvious limitation of both.⁶ In a recent conversation with a California Department of Fish and Game wildlife biologist, we were informed that sign of Desert bighorn has been observed recently within the Granite Mountains.⁷ Bighorn sheep surveys of this area in the summer and fall seasons should be conducted before any conclusions are made with regard to the current status of this species in the range and in relationship to the proposed project.

⁴ The DEIS does not discuss how this road will be upgraded or what the impacts of its widening will be on the ACEC. As discussed below, this is one of the most serious problems with this document.

⁵ The DEIS states that “[w]ind energy development is not considered to be a compatible use within an ACEC.” DEIS at 3-194. While we agree with and commend this statement, it appears limited to actual turbines, *see id.*, and, if this project is any guide, to exclude access roads

⁶ It is well-accepted that the lack of listing of an area in the CNDDDB as a place where a particular species is found is no evidence whatsoever that the species is not there.

⁷ A. Pauli, personal communication with Jeff Aardahl, Defenders of Wildlife.

In the case of most of these species and other biological resources of the project area, the DEIS contains no real impact analysis. See below. However, many of its conclusory assertions heighten our concerns. For example, the DEIS concludes that if the Mojave monkeyflower is present, it will receive a “substantially adverse” impact, because “Proposed Project construction could remove individual plants.” DEIS at 3-96. The same is true of the Ford’s Indra butterfly. *Id.* Because that subspecies has very limited distribution and an “already small population,” destruction of its host plants will have a substantially adverse impact. *Id.* As discussed below, although the DEIS asserts repeatedly that mitigation measures will reduce these impacts, it wholly fails to support such assertions. Unless and until information is provided that will substantiate the predicted impacts to these important resources, it will be difficult, if not impossible, for reviewers to conclude that the benefits of this project outweigh the costs.

The Granite Mountain Wind Project DEIS

Our concerns with the draft EIS relate to five key elements: the purpose and need statement, the alternatives considered, its treatment of the proposed action, its treatment of direct impacts, including its approach to Best Management Practices (BMPs), and its cumulative impact analysis. Many of these elements were major problems with the Bureau’s first fast-track DEIS, the DEIS on the Proposed Ivanpah Solar Electric Generating System, and, as indicated above, it is distressing to see them appear in an EIS on a technology – wind – with which the BLM has had more experience permitting than it has had with concentrating solar technologies in general and the “power tower” technology in particular. Our organizations also believe that the DEIS should have addressed the impacts that climate change will have on species and their habitats.

Purpose and Need: The purpose and need statement for this project is slightly broader than the one in the original Ivanpah draft, but it remains too narrow. Ivanpah’s original purpose and need was explicitly limited to a stark dichotomy: “approve” or “deny” the company’s application for a solar project and, as the result, the first draft document addressed only the “no action” option and the “proposed project.” A supplemental draft with a revised purpose and need and additional alternatives was issued in an attempt to remedy this egregious approach to “the heart” of the process established by the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA).

The Granite Mountains Wind EIS draft states that the BLM’s purpose and need is “to respond to” the company’s ROW application. DEIS at A-11. As discussed below, this mindset affected the inadequate range of alternatives examined. The BLM should avoid both this mindset as well as too narrow a statement of purpose and need in order to help ensure that its EISs are legally defensible documents. In place of the statement that was used here, our organizations urge the adoption of the following to achieve these goals:

The purpose of the proposed action is to “facilitate environmentally responsible commercial development of solar energy projects”⁸ consistent with the statutory authorities and policies applicable to the Bureau of Land Management, including those providing for contributions towards achieving the renewable energy and economic stimulus and renewable energy development objectives under the Energy Policy Act of 2005 (EPAAct), the American Recovery and Re-Investment Act, and Presidential and Secretarial orders as well as the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA).

The need for this action is to implement Federal policies, orders and

⁸ This quotation is from Secretary Salazar himself.

laws that mandate or encourage the development of renewable energy sources, including the Energy Policy Act of 2005, which encourages the Department of the Interior to seek to approve at least 10,000 MW of non-hydropower renewable energy on public lands by 2015, and the Federal policy goal of producing 10% of the nation's electricity from renewable resources by 2010 and 25% by 2025; to enable effective implementation of the economic incentives for qualifying projects intended by the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act; and to support the State of California's renewable energy and climate change objectives, consistent with BLM's mandates and responsibilities under FLPMA.

This kind of purpose and need statement would clearly satisfy applicable legal requirements, *see, e.g., National Parks Conservation Assn v. BLM*, 586 F.3rd 735 (9th Cir. 2009), and thus help ensure that environmentally acceptable projects will not only be permitted but will also be built without unnecessary delays.

Alternatives: The DEIS for the Granite Mountain Wind project suffers from virtually the same problem as did the Ivanpah DEIS: *i.e.*, the choices are between the project and no project. Granted, this DEIS has several land use plan options, *see, e.g.,* DEIS at 2, and two different options for locating the new access road and the new substation in the action alternative, *id.* at 2-3 – 2-4, but basically the choice is extremely and illegally limited to one “build” alternative. Obviously, no “range” of alternatives has been considered – even though the alternatives section, as stated above, is “the heart of the environmental impact statement.” 40 C.F.R. § 1502.14.

NEPA requires BLM to “rigorously explore and objectively evaluate” a range of alternatives to proposed federal actions. *See* 40 C.F.R. §§ 1502.14(a), 1508.25(c). “An agency must look at every reasonable alternative, with the range dictated by the nature and scope of the proposed action.” Nw. Env'tl. Defense Center v. Bonneville Power Admin. 117 F.3d 1520, 1538 (9th Cir. 1997). An agency violates NEPA by failing to “rigorously explore and objectively evaluate all reasonable alternatives” to the proposed action. City of Tenakee Springs v. Clough, 915 F.2d 1308, 1310 (9th Cir. 1990) (quoting 40 C.F.R. § 1502.14). This evaluation extends to considering more environmentally protective alternatives and mitigation measures. *See, e.g., Kootenai Tribe of Idaho v. Veneman*, 313 F.3d 1094, 1122–23 (9th Cir. 2002) (and cases cited therein). For this project and EIS, the consideration of more environmentally protective alternatives is also consistent with the Federal Land Policy and Management Act's requirement that BLM “minimize adverse impacts on the natural, environmental, scientific, cultural, and other resources and values (including fish and wildlife habitat) of the public lands involved.” 43 U.S.C. §1732(d)(2)(a).

Not only did the DEIS not consider an actual “range” of alternatives, the BLM refused to analyze at least two reasonable alternatives that it identified: an alternative involving fewer turbines – *i.e.*, a smaller project, and an alternative involving a different project site. With respect to the former, the DEIS asserts that BLM looked at an option involving 3-6 fewer turbines, but rejected that option after deciding that it would not adequately resolve identified visual resource conflicts. DEIS at 2-15. With respect to the latter, the document acknowledges the potential benefits of looking at different locations, *id.*, including finding locations that are “less sensitive for specific resource values,” but, in the end, it asserts that the company and BLM looked at lots of other places and determined that the proposed area was one of the few that met applicable criteria, *id.* at 2-16 – 2-17. Those criteria included sites that “could accommodate at least 20 turbines, *id.* at 2-16 – proof positive of the BLM's problems with the “purpose and need statement” of this (and other) EISs and specifically that it is unreasonably and inappropriately narrow, reflecting the applicant's purpose and need rather than a legitimate one for the Bureau. In sum, these explanations amount

to little more than the BLM saying “trust us” when it comes to other options – the very antithesis of NEPA’s goals.

Rather than rely on trust, NEPA was enacted to force agencies to document their compliance with “the letter and spirit of the Act” so that their decisions will be “based on understanding of environmental consequences” and their actions will “protect, restore and enhance the environment.” 40 C.F.R. §§ 1500.1 (a) and (c). The BLM should take steps immediately to remedy this egregious error by preparing a supplement that will present at least these two additional alternatives for consideration by the public as well as decision-makers.⁹ The supplement should also correct the other flaws in the draft that we discuss herein.

Treatment of the Proposed Action: NEPA documents are required to provide sufficient detail about alternatives considered, including the proposed action, so that reviewers “may evaluate their comparative merits.” A fundamental problem with this DEIS is the fact that there is really no proposed action yet: no precise location for any of the 28 turbines has been chosen yet. Instead those locations will be chosen at some time in the future allegedly in accordance with BMPs established following completion of the wind PEIS. For example, rather than provide a specific location for any turbines, the DEIS states that “a spring botanical survey shall be conducted to locate and map ... any ... plant species which support Ford’s Indra swallowtail butterfly within the Proposed Project’s permanent and temporary impact areas” and “[t]o the extent possible, these resources shall be avoided.” DEIS at 3-108. *See also id.* at 3-105 (similar measure for “Mojave monkeyflower, Joshua trees, yucca and any other special status plant”).

In addition, the BLM does not yet know how many turbines the project will involve – “up to 28,” *see, e.g.*, DEIS at 1, or what kind of turbines they will be. *Id.* The DEIS implies that the kind of turbines selected will have no environmental significance – *e.g.*, that they are all equally noisy or will have the same impact on bats, but the document has no information that would help readers know whether and to what extent this is true. Nor does it bother to tell readers when, how and by whom the decision as to what kind of turbines will be employed will be made.

In effect the proposal this DEIS is trying to analyze is one involving some unknown number of turbines of some unknown type and size in some unknown locations. Presumably at some point these unknowns will become known pursuant to a process which is not described but which will certainly not involve any public participation. It is not even clear that the BLM will be closely involved in that process: on the contrary, again and again the BMPs, state “operators shall” as in “[o]perators shall determine the presence of bat colonies and avoid placing turbines near known bat hibernation, breeding, and maternity/nursery colonies,” but with no *id.* at 3-102. *Compare id.* at 3-102 (“A habitat restoration plan shall be developed to avoid, minimize or mitigate negative impacts on vulnerable wildlife.... The plan shall identify reclamation ... measures that shall be implemented....”) with *id.* at 3-108 (“[A] noise monitoring and vibration plan would be developed *and approved by BLM....*” (emphasis added)). This is the equivalent of the BLM saying “trust

⁹ The mere fact that lands are not administered by BLM does not render an offsite alternative unreasonable. In defining what is a “reasonable” range of alternatives, NEPA requires consideration of alternatives “that are practical or feasible” and not just “whether the proponent or applicant likes or is itself capable of carrying out a particular alternative”; in fact, “[a]n alternative that is outside the legal jurisdiction of the lead agency must still be analyzed in the EIS if it is reasonable.” Council on Environmental Quality, *Forty Most Asked Questions Concerning CEQ’s National Environmental Policy Act Regulations, Questions 2A and 2B* (emphasis added), available at <http://ceq.hss.doe.gov/nepa/regs/40/40p3.htm>; 40 C.F.R. §§ 1502.14, 1506.2(d). The California Energy Commission considers alternatives that include private lands provided site control can be obtained in a reasonable timeframe and with some certainty.

them” – the developers – and again is antithetical to NEPA’s purposes.¹⁰ And, because there are no specific places identified, the DEIS’ treatment of impacts is equally flawed. See discussion below.

Direct Impacts and BMPs: The analysis of impacts is supposed to provide “the scientific and analytic basis for” comparing alternatives and for decision-making. 40 C.F.R. § 1502.16. As noted above, the DEIS acknowledges the need to provide site-specific information, and indeed NEPA requires that such information be provided. In this case, however, the DEIS’ treatment of impacts suffers from numerous flaws.

First, because the project has not been defined all of the predicted site specific impacts are completely speculative. For example, the DEIS states that *if* vegetation is removed that hosts the Ford’s Indra swallowtail butterfly, then the impacts will be significantly adverse. DEIS at 3-96. Second, virtually all the speculative impacts are discounted by reference to BMPs. For example, in discussing impacts to this butterfly, the DEIS states that “with implementation of avoidance, minimization, and mitigation measures identified [elsewhere in the DEIS], impacts would be reduced.” *Id.* See also, e.g., *id.* (Mojave monkeyflower); 3-99 (“potential desert tortoise habitat”); (bats). Similarly, although this project is within a KRA, the anticipated impacts are allegedly going to be reduced because of these BMPs, *id.* at 3-98, although the DEIS does conceded that migratory bird species like turkey vultures and American white pelicans and resident bird and bat species “may still collide with turbines and other structures/facilities during operation of the Proposed Project. *Id.* These assertions are completely unsupported by any details or other information that would enable readers to form independent judgments of the degree to which these impacts will be reduced.

In addition, in some cases, the DEIS doesn’t even bother to purport to analyze impacts. For example, although both alternative access routes would go through the Bendire’s Thrasher ACEC, there is no analysis of their impacts, but rather the assertion that “[p]otential adverse impacts would be mitigated by Mitigation Measure MMBIO44.” *Id.* at 3-197. The golden eagle is treated similarly: although, as noted above, the presence of golden eagles including nesting has been documented in the project area, and the fact that they have a “tendency to collide with turbines while hunting,” *id.* Vol. II, App. F at 22, the DEIS does not analyze the impact construction of this project would have on this protected species and considers no mitigation measures other than “monitoring.” But monitoring is not mitigation. The authors of the DEIS clearly assume that the applicant will obtain an incidental take permit but, as indicated above, they have not documented compliance with surveys requirements that are part of the application process. See discussion of Golden eagles above.

Cumulative Impacts: The DEIS acknowledges the need to analyze cumulative impacts associated with renewable project proposals in this area as well as other development proposals. As it recognizes, there are multiple renewable projects proposed in the vicinity of the Granite Wind project area that will contribute to overall cumulative impacts to sensitive resources in this area as well as multiple other kinds of projects that will also contribute to these impacts. See, e.g., *id.* at 3-263 – 3-265 (Table 3.17-A) (listing existing and future foreseeable renewable and other projects). Not all of these projects are being permitted by the Bureau. Some of those and still others may not proceed because of the economy. *Id.* at 3-265. Nonetheless, all reasonable efforts must be made to obtain and disclose adequate information regarding their potential impacts and construction timing so that a full picture of cumulative impacts can be presented in the final EIS.

¹⁰ Another example of the BLM’s “trust us/them” attitude is the fact that the agency has not proposed to establish a limit – or threshold – on the number of avian and bat collisions with turbines and other structures that are part of this proposed project. Cf. DEIS at 3-110.

The DEIS utilizes qualitative information about these existing and foreseeable projects to develop estimates and model impacts to key topics such as air quality and certain biological resources. More quantitative information is required by NEPA to supplement this qualitative material. Although the DEIS purports to evaluate species of special concern and their habitats, the “analysis” is devoid of detailed information. We are told that the project will contribute little to cumulative impacts, *id.* at 3-269, but we have no real understanding of what those impacts are or what the relative contribution(s) this project will make.

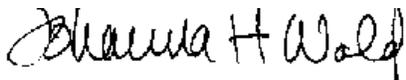
Climate Change Impacts: The DEIS’s discussion of climate change focuses on the reduction of greenhouse gases and the development of renewable energy resources. That is, it looks at the effects of the proposed action on climate change. It does not, however, analyze the impacts of climate change on species of concern in the project area or on their habitats. The latter impacts are clearly relevant. *See, e.g.*, Secretarial Order 3289, Addressing the Impacts of Climate Change on America’s Water, Land, and Other Natural and Cultural Resources (February 22, 2010). Such an analysis will allow the BLM to assess and reduce the vulnerabilities of the proposed action to climate change, integrate climate change adaptation into the proposed action and alternatives and produce accurate predictions of environmental consequences of the proposed actions and alternatives.

Conclusion

This is an extremely disappointing DEIS. The nation has just celebrated the 40th birthday of NEPA and yet this document reads as if it were written in the early days after passage of that Act. We urge the BLM to correct its flaws immediately and, in addition, to take prompt action to ensure that these flaws are not repeated in other impact statements on other wind projects.

Thank you in advance for your consideration of our views. If you have any questions about them, please do not hesitate to contact Johanna Wald of NRDC at 415-875-6100 or jwald@nrdc.org.

Sincerely,



Johanna Wald
Helen O’Shea
Natural Resources Defense Council



Jeff Aardahl
Defenders of Wildlife



Alice Bond
The Wilderness Society