February 22, 2015

California Energy Commission
Dockets Office, MS-4
Docket No. 09-RENEW EO-01
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, CA 95814-5512

By email to: docket@energy.ca.gov


To Whom It May Concern:

The San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society (SBVAS) is the local chapter of the National Audubon Society for almost all of Riverside and San Bernardino Counties, and has about two thousand members in that area. Our chapter area thus covers most of the DRECP area. Our missions are the protection of habitat for birds and other wildlife, and public education about the environment. We are a 501(c)3 organization.

In addition to the comments filed by Lozeau Druy and Audubon California on the DRECP, which it hereby supports, SBVAS wishes to point out to the Commission that the Development Focus Area shown on the preferred alternative map as a roughly triangular area to the east of Barstow includes nesting habitat for the state endangered Tricolored Blackbird (Agelaius tricolor).

During the 2014 Statewide Survey, 1,209 Tricolored Blackbirds were counted in the vicinity of Newberry Springs east of Barstow in the preferred alternative map area referenced above. They were nesting in two backyard ponds just off Minnola Road and in a third pond near Silver Valley Road about six miles farther east. Much of their foraging was in nearby alfalfa fields where they were able to find an ample supply of insects for successful nesting. The birds were also foraging at small ranches where the Tricolored Blackbirds took advantage of spilled grain for chukars and other livestock. The birds foraged to a more limited degree in the bordering desert habitat.

In the winter, the tricolored joined other blackbird species and foraged in alfalfa, fallow hay fields and at a dairy on Pine Road. In mid-December 2014, about 1,009 Tricolored Blackbirds were seen near Minnola Road by a SBVAS field trip led by Gene Cardiff, indicating that a majority of the birds remain year round.

A banded tricolor was photographed at a ranch in Newberry Springs, providing circumstantial evidence that these birds originated in the Central Valley. The only person banded tricolors is Robert Moose, who only bands in the Central Valley. There is also some genetic evidence that there is limited interchange between southern California and Central Valley populations.
No matter the place of origin of these birds, they constitute a significant portion of the worldwide population, and as such deserve protection. Turning the area into an array of solar farms or wind turbines will further reduce the population of this endangered bird, whose numbers are already in steep decline. We therefore urge the Commission to withdraw the area described as a Development Focus Area.

Sincerely,

[Signature]

Drew Feldmann
Conservation Chair
Response to Comment Letter E60

San Bernardino Valley Audubon Society

Drew Feldmann
February 22, 2015

E60-1 Thank you for your comment. No change in the document is required as a result of this comment.

E60-2 Although there is a Development Focus Area (DFA) in the Newberry Springs area, Conservation Management Actions (CMAs) require avoidance of and setbacks from riparian habitat and wetland habitat (LUPA-BIO-RIPWET-1) that would avoid and minimize the impacts on tricolored blackbird and other riparian birds. In addition, pre-construction/activity nesting bird surveys are required for activities that occur within 0.25 mile of a riparian or wetland vegetation type that may impact BLM sensitive riparian and wetland birds species. Setback of activities 0.25 mile from active nests of BLM sensitive riparian and wetland bird species during the breeding season (LUPA-BIO-RIPWET-3) would be determined based on the results of the nesting bird survey.
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