

Thank you for your comment, Diane Johnson.

The comment tracking number that has been assigned to your comment is SolarS50513.

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Solar Energy Development PEIS
Comment ID: SolarS50513

First Name: Diane
Middle Initial:
Last Name: Johnson
Organization:
Address: PO Box 712
Address 2:
Address 3:
City: Borrego Springs
State: CA
Zip: 92004
Country: USA
Email: depjohnson@aol.com
Privacy Preference: Don't withhold name or address from public record
Attachment: Scoping study comment nophoto.doc

Comment Submitted:

This is the written component of my comment. A photo will follow (I hope!) [See Attachment.](#)

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on your PEIS scoping study. I am neither a technical expert, developer/investor, or environmental activist. But I am a resident of Borrego Springs (northwest of El Centro CA, west of the Salton Sea), and like most desert dwellers – especially those who live within a state park, as we do in Borrego Springs – I am concerned to guard against damages that might be done to our landscape and environment. Especially since scars on the desert – whether physical marks on the landscape, or biological wounds to the ecosystem – show for decades or even centuries, and are visible for miles around. This is very different from an area like metropolitan Washington D.C., where I lived for a number of years. When I felt the need to get a "big vista" I'd go to the Potomac – and look up, or down, river for a few miles. Visibility is not long in D.C., and very few unspoiled landscapes remain – most have already been impacted by buildings, roads, and transmission lines.

I wish to make two main points:

1. Water availability is key to many utility-scale solar installations, and whether there is in fact enough water to support solar electricity generation might be more economically limiting than other factors. Obviously -- at least I hope so -- Southern California deserts differ very dramatically from the D.C. area in terms of water availability. A river does not run through it! There are very few streams even, and no surface water lakes (except the poor Salton Sea, evaporating relentlessly day by day). Moreover, the size and condition of underground aquifers -- which are relied on to meet the water needs of the residents and businesses of all Southern California desert towns -- are not definitively known. As I understand it, getting a really good, scientific measurement of aquifer size, charge/recharge, and current water amount would require equipment such as that used in searching for new oil fields. But resources like that are not beyond DOE and BLM -- getting good water data could be a very positive benefit of this PEIS.

2. Disturbance or destruction of the desert environment carries many, many ill effects. Solar energy installations themselves, clearly, have a very direct impact on the environment in which they are sited. Damage done to the many thousands of acres on which solar installations would sit would be both immediate and ongoing/cumulative. In addition, the back-up generation plants which might be required would have their own, enormous environmental impacts, just like those of the solar installations (but with even more water usage, probably).

Because deserts are in fact anything but empty wastelands, these effects on the environment can be wide-ranging, damaging everything from insects (important in pollinating alfalfa, a major crop in the lower desert area near El Centro), to animals, to plant life. There are even health effects to humans. It is well recognized now that the large amounts of dust blown by the wind in Imperial County are causing high rates of asthma among residents. One reason for the higher amount of airborne dust in Imperial County is that the ground has been disturbed over thousands of acres, by farm equipment. It is common to be driving down Highway S78 and come into a windy area where the dust reduces driving visibility significantly -- this happened to me on the way to the scoping meeting in El Centro, in fact. Similarly, it often happens that the air is clear in northwestern areas of the Anza Borrego Desert State Park, but a thick cloud of dust, rising high into the air, covers the Ocotillo Wells State Vehicle Recreation Area to the southeast, due to offroad activity.

Huge additional amounts of land would be impacted by the construction of transmission lines, to carry the electricity generated by solar energy. The local, immediate environmental effects would be the same as for the solar installations themselves. But here the cumulative – cumulating over space as well as time – effects would be huge. While a solar plant might not be visible more than 10 or so miles away, the transmission

lines would be visible for hundreds of miles in their relentless march. This ill effect is aesthetic and even perhaps spiritual – it has long been recognized in America how important it is to preserve some of the wildness first found in our New World. I could quote John Muir, Theodore Roosevelt, etc., but will spare you that!