



DESERT TORTOISE COUNCIL

4654 East Avenue S #257B
Palmdale, California 93552

www.deserttortoise.org
ed.larue@verizon.net

31 May 2015

Via email only

James G. Kenna, State Director
Bureau of Land Management
California State Office
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1623
Sacramento, California 95825
jkenna@blm.gov

Karen Douglas, Commissioner
California Energy Commission
Dockets Office, MS-4, Docket No. 09-RENEW EO-01
1516 Ninth Street
Sacramento, California 95814-5512
docket@energy.ca.gov, DRECP NEPA/CEQA

RE: Defenders of Wildlife letter entitled “Mohave ground squirrel recommendations for DRECP Land Use Plan Amendment”

Dear Mr. Kenna,

The Desert Tortoise Council (Council) is a non-profit organization comprised of hundreds of professionals and laypersons who share a common concern for wild desert tortoises and a commitment to advancing the public’s understanding of this species. Established in 1975 to promote conservation of tortoises in the deserts of the southwestern United States and Mexico, the Council regularly provides information to individuals, organizations and regulatory agencies on matters potentially affecting the desert tortoise within its historical range.

We recently became aware of a letter submitted to your office by Defenders of Wildlife (Defenders), dated 15 May 2015. Therein, Defenders lists specific “Conservation Designations” and “Management Prescriptions/Conservation Management Actions” that are intended to enhance protection of Mohave ground squirrel (*Xerospermophilus mohavensis*) and their habitats in the western and northwestern portions of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) area. Rather than reiterate specific components of that letter, we have attached the first page to our letter as Attachment 1.

Whereas Defenders proposes conservation designations and protective measures based on protection of Mohave ground squirrel, we note that each of the designations and management proposals would also provide for enhanced conservation and management of important habitats for Agassiz's desert tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*). As such, we herein provide our full support and endorsement of Defenders' recommendations for the final DRECP Land Use Plan Amendment.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "E. LaRue, Jr.", is enclosed in a light blue rectangular box.

Edward L., LaRue, Jr., M.S.
Desert Tortoise Council, Ecosystems Advisory Committee, Chairperson

Attachment 1



California Office
1701 S Street, Suite 1700 | Sacramento, CA 95834 | tel. 916.331.3800 | fax 916.331.3811
www.defenders.org

May 15, 2015

Via Electronic Mail

James C. Kenna, State Director
Bureau of Land Management
California State Office
2800 Cottage Way, Suite W-1625
Sacramento, CA 95835
Via email: jkenna@blm.gov

Re: Mohave ground squirrel recommendations for the DRECP Land Use Plan Amendment

Dear Jim:

On March 10, 2015, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced a change in the direction of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP). At that time, the BLM stated that it was going to move forward with finalizing a Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) before the completion of any part of a DRECP decision document or permits involving private land development and/or conservation and federal and state endangered species permitting. We are writing to provide the BLM with recommendations for the conservation of the Mohave ground squirrel (MGS) on public lands under a final DRECP LUPA. Copies of this letter will be immediately sent to the California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), and the California Energy Commission (CEC).

Background

Defenders has supported conservation of the MGS for many years primarily through protection of its habitat. Due to ongoing concerns over cumulative loss of its habitat due to human land use activities, Defenders petitioned the Secretary of the Interior to have the species listed including designation of its critical habitat in 2005. In response to that petition, in 2010, the USFWS found the petition contained new information indicating the species may warrant listing and announced a 12-month status review. However, in October 2011, the USFWS determined that the species did not warrant listing "at this time."

In making that unwarranted listing determination in 2011, the USFWS relied, in large part, on the West Mojave (WJMO) Plan and its Mohave ground squirrel conservation provisions. BLM adopted alternative B of that plan in the 2006 Record of Decision (ROD), which amended the California Desert Conservation Area Plan and resulted in the designation of the MGS Wildlife Habitat Management Area (WHMA) (sometimes referred to as the MGS Conservation Area), which is comprised of approximately 1.7 million acres of public land. Although multiple land uses were allowed, BLM adopted a conservation framework under which the agency allowed for a maximum

National Headquarters
1325 17th Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20036-1297
tel. 202.336.3100 | fax 202.336.3120