

## **Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP)**

The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) effort is designed to provide a comprehensive approach to siting and permitting renewable energy projects in the California desert region while prescribing and implementing desert-wide species conservation. Conceived in 2008, the DRECP is incorporating the Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP) Act principals of ecosystem, species, and habitat conservation and management to achieve its goals. As an NCCP, the DRECP would provide comprehensive incidental take authorization of species protected under the California Endangered Species Act (CESA), avoiding the often litigious and controversial approach of individual permits for construction and operation of Renewable Portfolio Standard (RPS) renewable energy generation and transmission projects. Development of the DRECP will include extensive science-based research and evaluation in order to provide the necessary take authorization of species protected under CESA and, ideally, the federal Endangered Species Act.

The planning process is led by the governor's office and Natural Resources Agency. A 27-member steering committee comprised of the Department of Fish and Game (DFG), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Bureau of Land Management, California Energy Commission, local government representatives, RPS project development companies, the environmental community and recreational interests guide the deliberative process that will result in a conservation vision and strategy in spring 2011, and completed NCCP and implementing agreement in winter 2012. A planning agreement (April 2010) sets forth planning goals and objectives and a series of working groups convened by the steering committee are addressing fundamental planning issues.

Proponents of the DRECP approach to balancing renewable energy land uses with natural resource conservation believe a comprehensive assessment involving local land use authorities, regulatory agencies and the affected public and industry will result in a defensible plan. Opponents of the approach believe the time and cost required to complete the planning process and reach a permitting solution outweigh the more comprehensive benefits of system-wide conservation and permitting.

DFG plays a central role in developing the DRECP and will be ultimately responsible for considering approval of the plan as an NCCP. Currently, DFG is active on steering committee working groups, provides technical support and guidance to state and federal agencies, prepares and evaluates interim work products such as maps and assessments, and evaluates interim projects for consistency with the planning agreement goals and objectives. DFG supports this effort resulting in a comprehensive blue print for conservation in the California desert region.