

Meeting Notes: Renewable Energy (Wind and Solar) General Plan Amendment,
November 4, 2010, 7:00 p.m. at Statham Hall in Lone Pine

About 12 people participated, 7 signed in.

Josh Hart, Inyo County Planning Director, led the meeting. Josh began with introductions and explained the sign-in sheet, handouts and survey form.

Josh then gave a presentation on the Renewable Energy General Plan Amendment that included a review of the proposed update language; an overview of the transmission issues involving the distribution of power generated by renewable sources; a description of the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan and how the County's proposed General Plan updated will work along with it; explained the Planning Department's Renewable Energy webpage (how to find it and what information is there); described the General Plan overlay boundaries and how they have been developed and are continuing to be refined through a public process; and explained that a few of the main criteria in drawing the boundaries were flat areas (they were mainly looking a solar when the planning process began), proximity to transmission lines and wires, and locations where there was known interest in developing renewable energy facilities. Josh then reviewed each of the proposed overlay maps and described the issues that have been brought up, to date, for each. Josh then opened the meeting to questions and comments.

Questions and comments included:

Comment) there are no Indian reservations/tribal lands shown on the maps, maybe they would like to do renewable energy projects on their land.

Q) What current renewable energy generation is there now in Inyo County?

A) There is a lot of hydropower on the Westside of the county and there is Coso. There is limited solar at Furnace Creek and DWP is looking a couple of sites to develop. There are several in Nevada just across the border.

Comment) There is a 200mw one in Nevada and a new one going in at Ivanpah.

Q) On your talking points #2 land use, access roads will be needed to get to these facilities and roads might need to be built through the wilderness to get to them.

A) Most of these areas already have existing roads, but some additional roads may need to be built. The General Plan directs the work to minimize the impacts.

Q) I still don't get how these areas were determined: why aren't the wilderness areas shown, why is part of Haiwee Lake in one of the areas?

A) It was a public process where staff worked with the Supervisors and other interested parties.

Q) Who, who was included, who are these interested parties?

A) There were people who are interested in developing renewable energy projects and others; it was an iterative process.

Q) Were private landowners included?

A) Yes some.

Q) Was the president involved?

Comment) There is a Congressional Mandate to NAPAC and OSD to look at renewable energy development in the California and Nevada deserts on DOD lands. Bases (missed the names) are looking at developing Photovoltaic on DOD lands and how to coordinate these efforts with local jurisdictions and the people living in them. We have to try to find the sweet-spot where the military can safely continue its mission and renewable energy generation can both occur on DOD land. We are looking into the possibility of private development of renewable energy on DOD land as well.

Q) I still don't see the criteria, how come some of the areas include wilderness?

A) We didn't start with it, it has been added after and we still need to adjust our areas by either splitting parcels or noting that they can't be developed on the maps.

Comment) The BLM will not allow development in wilderness areas whether they are on the maps or not.

Q) So, you will continue to refine these as you go.

A) Yes.

Q) So, once the County agrees and says here are our sites, will they oppose development outside of them?

A) We want to encourage appropriate development. If a renewable energy development is proposed outside of these areas on another jurisdiction's land, the County would hope that they would work with the County on that development.

Comment) What I am hearing from my constituents is the base of Inyo County's economy is tourism. We all know what four-corners looks like; they are worried about the degradation of the view-shed. Visitors want to see the vistas of wide-open spaces. These types of energy projects look very industrial and are not the kind of views that tourists want to see. This kind of development is not conducive to a tourism based economy and it will not bring many jobs into the County, but those who already live here will have to live with the development. This is also a military corridor all of those solar

panels set at a 30° could be blinding for pilots during combat training. These are things we really need to think about.

A) We are working with the military on safety issues.

Comment) This doesn't replace environmental review.

Q) Is that an EIR or just a review?

A) We don't know yet.

Q) When will you know, before the Planning Commission meeting? – Will there be scoping?

A) Not yet, scoping is defined in CEQA, this is not CEQA.

Comment) Another meeting.

Q) When will the CEQA process start.

A) We are thinking December.

Q) This will not take away the need for site specific CEQA?

A) No.

Comment) The Navy is looking at each renewable energy technology and determining how each will impact the environment and how it will work with their mission. They will use this information to guide where and how each renewable technology is used.

Q) With the scoping will the maps be revised?

A) Yes, along with the draft General Plan amendment the map will be included.

Comment) I have heard that the plan is to have all the area up and down Highway-395 covered with windmills and solar panels.

Comment) That would be inconsistent with our maps and we are having these meetings so that the public can have their say in where this type of development should go.

Comment) We have high points in Lone Pine if that land gets reflective stuff put on it, it can reflect to Mt. Whitney, that would be a big deterrent to visitors. I heard there were plans to use 4,000-acres for solar behind the Alabama Hills and if that happened they would feel the wrath . . .

Q) Is the California Energy Commission involved in this?

A) Yes, part of how the maps were developed was through them.

Q) Do they approve?

A) They do not have the authority to approve a General Plan amendment.

Q) Are these maps available on the County website?

A) Yes, you can find them on the planning page.

Comment) There is lots more information available with GIS that I am sure the County has. You need to go through this again with solid criteria and come up with better maps. Have you talked to the tribes, considered view-sheds . . . this needs much more work. DWP land, don't forget there are water agreements, people forget that there are groundwater issues and there are categories for different land types, like marsh lands, ground water recharge areas . . . these can't be changed.

Q) I heard that the population of Independence was going to double: has this happened?

A) No.

Comment) Policy #3 states that mitigation can offset impacts – avoiding impacts is the goal, this is a backwards approach.

Comment) The General Plan is trying to establish a policy for the physical area of the County. The major thrust for renewable energy is a Government order. It started with 20% and now it is 30% of energy has to come from renewable resources. On top of that there is the stimulus that gives 30% of the costs to the companies to develop energy from renewable resources. Without the stimulus the companies would disappear. Solar is not viable without the 30% from the government. Ivanpah is a 500mw facility it will produce enough energy for 150,000 to 160,000 homes. The solar ranch they are proposing for Lone Pine is 200mw, enough to power 70,000 homes. It takes 8-acres per megawatt to produce solar energy, with that many acres covered in solar panels it will be very hard not to impact the view-shed.

Q) I suggest that the whole approach to mapping the area be more distributed. What about smaller private solar energy production?

A) Individual solar panels for homes are allowed this is for large-scale projects and how we can guide where they go.

There were no more questions or comments. Some attendees stayed for a while and looked over the maps, asked questions and talked with each other.

