

Rock collecting on public lands in Southern California: A status report on land use policy

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Three major public lands policy milestones in California in 2016.

DRECP
(Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan)
September 14, 2016 – Signing ceremony for Final Phase 1
Record of Decision (ROD)

MTNM
(Mojave Trails National Monument)

May 20-21, 2016 – BLM Field Tour and DAC business mtg
Management Plan Sub-group is being formed to advise DAC

SGMNM
(San Gabriel Mountains National Monument)

October 15, 2016 – Management Plan Comment Period closes

*Some background & context on where we came from,
where we are now, and where we're going.*

Historically...

Land use planning and decision-making had a strong local imprint, with coordination among federal, state and county entities, and with public input and local-level involvement throughout much of the process.

In the works... Planning 2.0

Decision-making and final plans to be made in Washington D.C. with the objective of harmoniously integrating any given plan for any region in the U.S. into a larger coherent architecture.



Photo: Tom Brewster Photography.

Utility scale renewable energy projects – wind, solar and geothermal – are driving public land use policy. The Planning 2.0 initiative will be the vehicle guiding the process.

WEST

Jerry Brown pushes plan for a Western power grid

California's governor has been working with Oregon and other states to broaden the grid



California Gov. Jerry Brown speaks at the California Independent System Operator stakeholders' symposium. (Rich Pedroncelli/The Associated Press)

BY JULIET WILLIAMS

The Associated Press

SEPT. 11, 2016

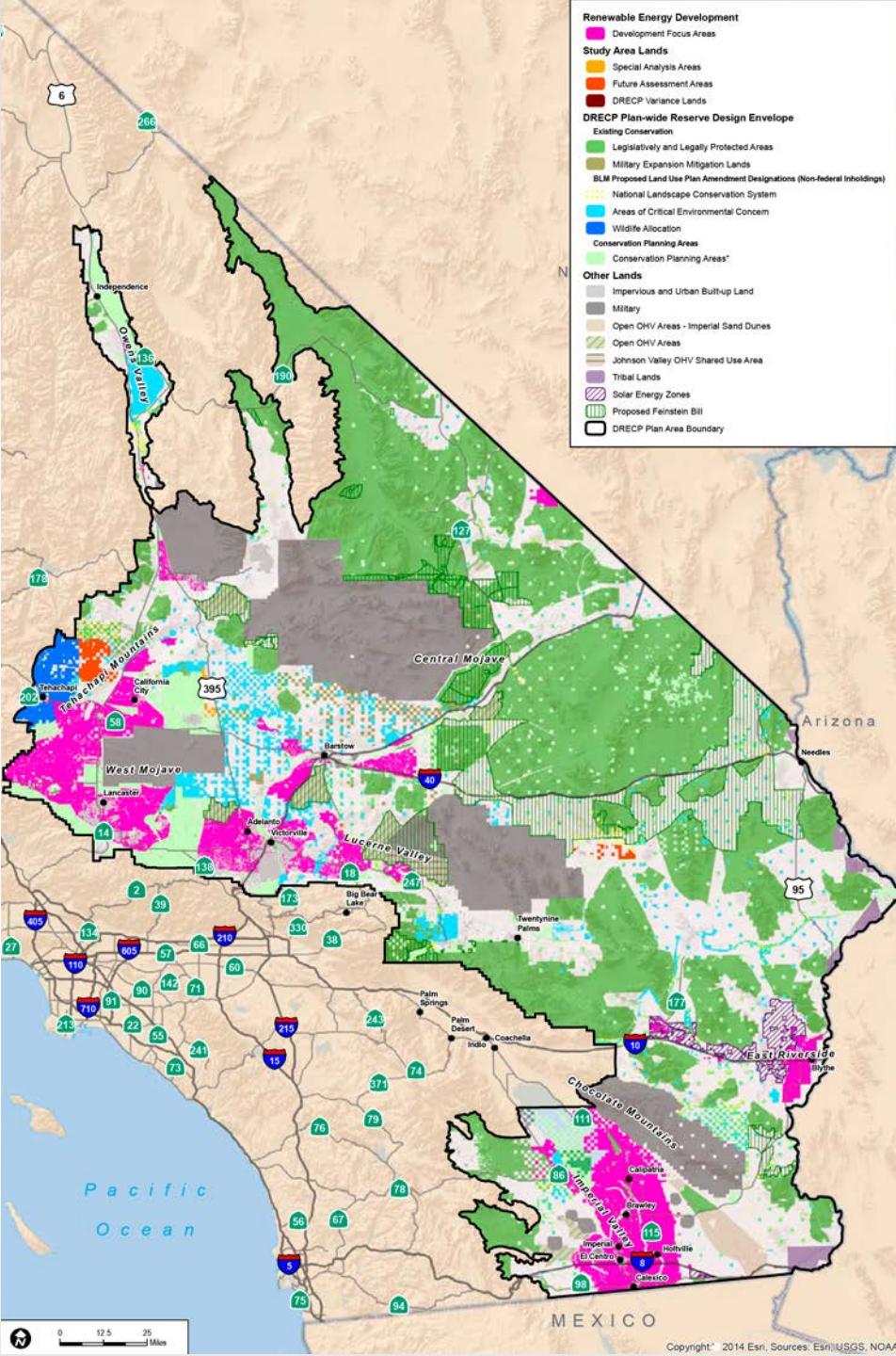


SACRAMENTO — Gov. Jerry Brown said last week that he remains committed to expanding California's power grid to include other Western states, despite a delay announced this summer when it appeared the state Legislature was unprepared to grant the broader approval needed to advance the project this year.

Utility-scale projects built in remote locations have to be connected with densely populated metropolitan areas (load centers) via power link corridors, which have yet to be built.

A vast network of power links will be built to meet the goal of interstate transmission.

The Western power grid will cover states west of the Rockies and between the borders with Mexican to the south and Canada to the north.



DRECP

(Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan)

The most ambitious land use amendment in California history.

The DRECP will serve as a “guideline” for administering 22.5 million acres of public and private lands in California’s deserts through 2040.

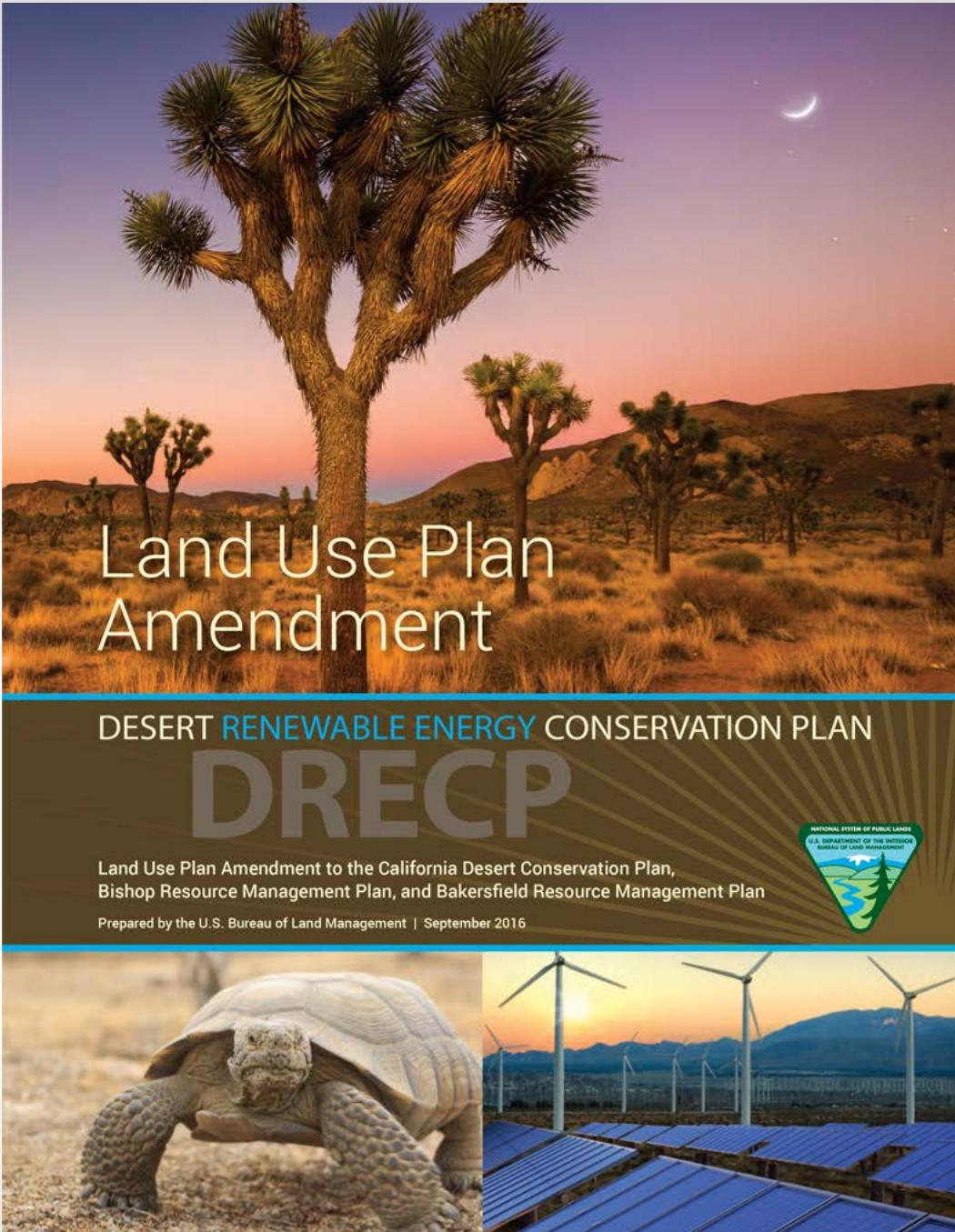
8 years in the making

8,000+ pages

more than 16,000 comment letters

Comment Period closed Feb 23, 2015

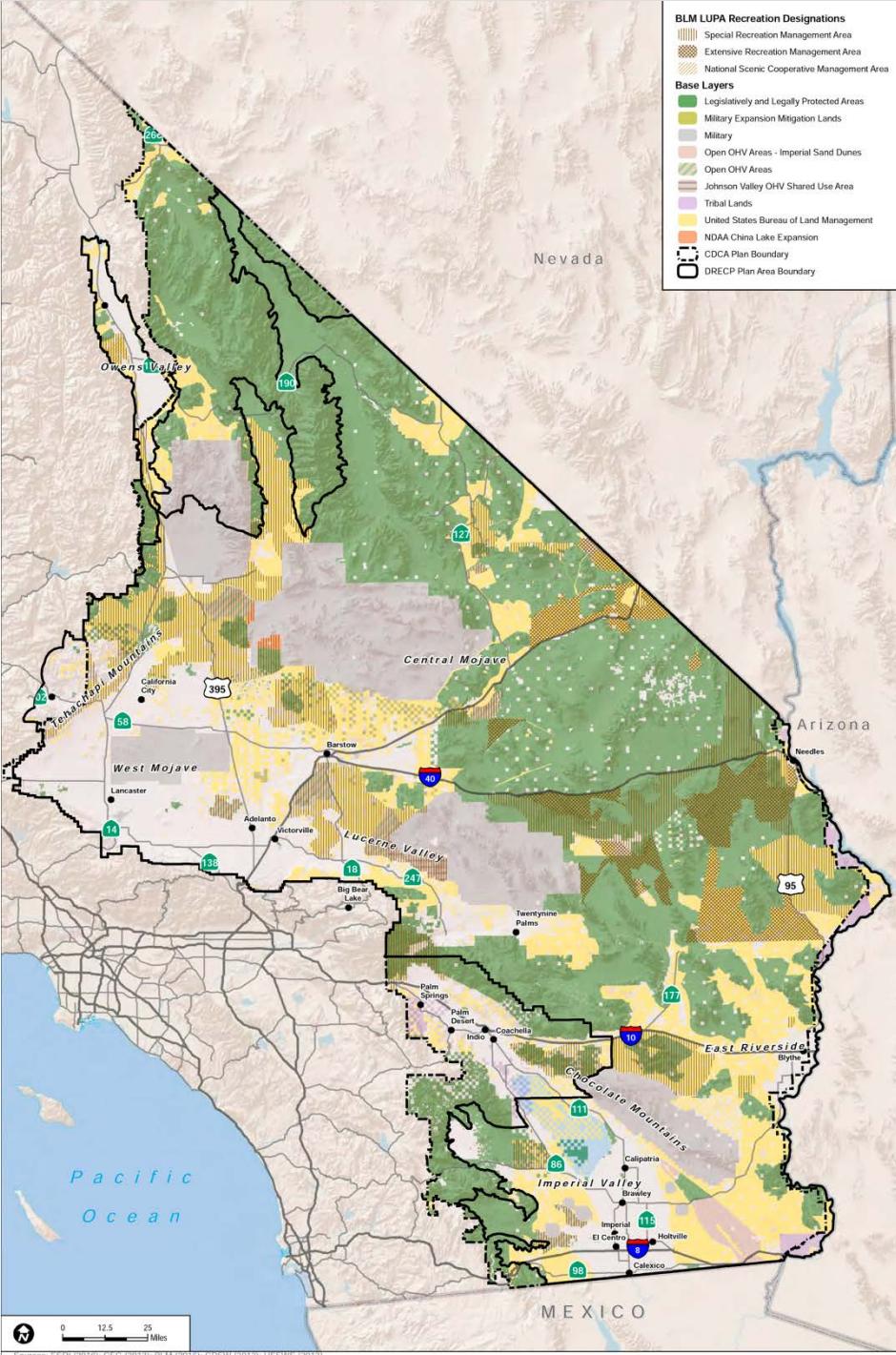
Draft DRECP Preferred Alternative - Conservation Plan. Bright magenta-colored areas are DFAs (Development Focus Areas), i.e., land available for utility scale projects, some of which are adjacent to rock collecting areas.



Draft DRECP received very strong criticism, so it was decided to roll it out in phases. Phase I focuses on conservation and recreational values of 10.8 million acres within an overall area of 22.5 million acres.



Sept 14, 2016 – Commissioner Karen Douglas, CEC; Secretary Sally Jewell, Dept. of the Interior; and California Director Jerome Perez, BLM, sign the Final Phase 1 Record of Decision.



Land use designations were revised in the Phase I ROD based on numerous negative comment/protest letters.

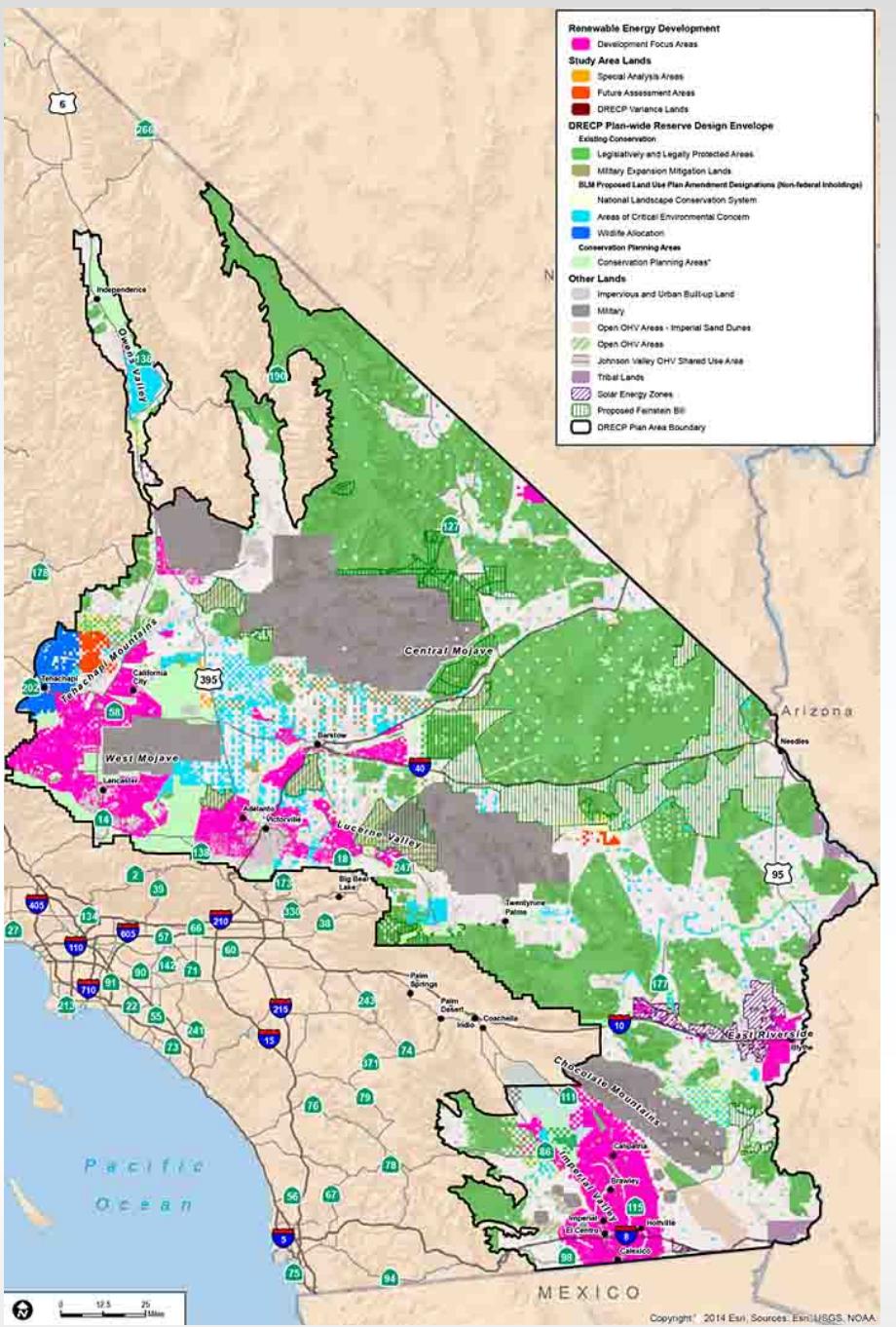
DFAs were changed where they conflicted with rock collecting areas. (Rockhounding is categorized in the “recreation” designation.)

According to the BLM, this change to the DFAs, which was finalized in the ROD, was based on “many detailed comment letters submitted to the DRECP.”

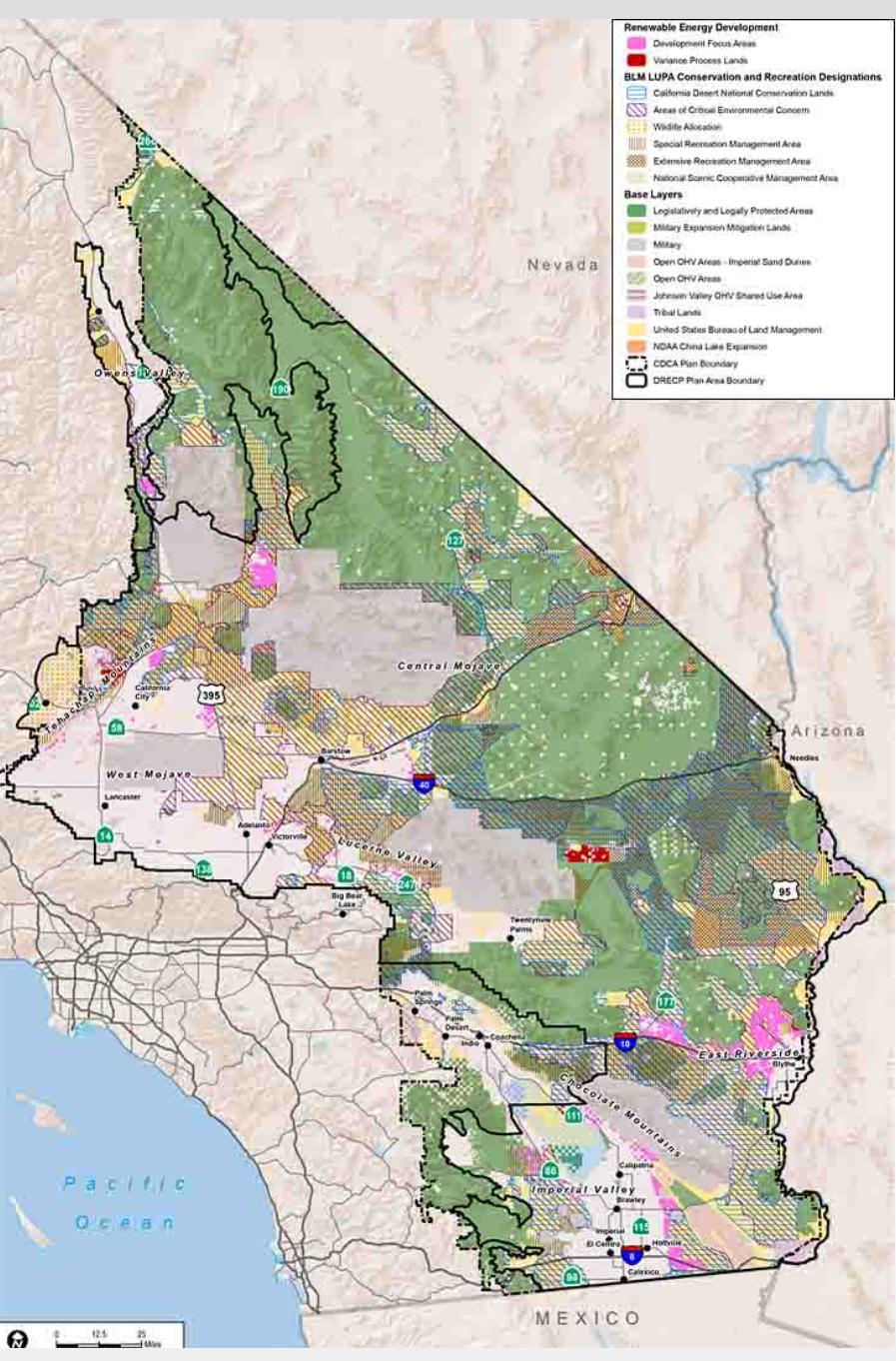
SDMG submitted a 48-page letter. Thank you to Randy Banis and Shaun Gonzales, whose help was invaluable.

Thanks to all Rockhounds who submitted a letter to the DRECP – you made a difference!

Figure 6. DRECP LUPA Recreation designations.
Source: DRECP BLM Plan Amendment, Sept 2016.



Draft DRECP showing DFAs (magenta-colored areas).



Final DRECP showing changes to DFAs.

The DRECP Phase I Record of Decision paves the way to implement
Phase II – industrializing the California desert



DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

DRECP

DRECP.org





Desert District Advisory Council (DAC) Board Meeting, Barstow, May 21, 2016. Photo: John Martin.

The DAC members represent the special interests of different groups, and they intermediate with the BLM on behalf of the Public. Randy Banis (center left, white shirt) represents Recreation (rockhounding is under Recreation). At the present time, there is greater comity on the DAC, mutual tolerance for historically competing values and support for rockhounds.



The trajectory of land use policy should give Rockhounds pause to reconsider who their adversaries really are and consider the alternatives, if efforts at respectful compromise (by all stakeholders) are not made where competing values exist.



Mojave Fringe-toed Lizard (*Uma scoparia*).
Photo: Joyce Gross.



Desert Tortoise (*Gopherus agassizii*) in the Mojave Desert.
Photo: Dana Wilson, BLM.



Industrialization of the desert should be a galvanizing issue for stakeholders who have divergent values but none of whom want this.

DRECP Phase II will enable fast-track permitting for renewable energy projects so that as many utilities and power links can be built ASAP.



Streamlining Renewable Energy

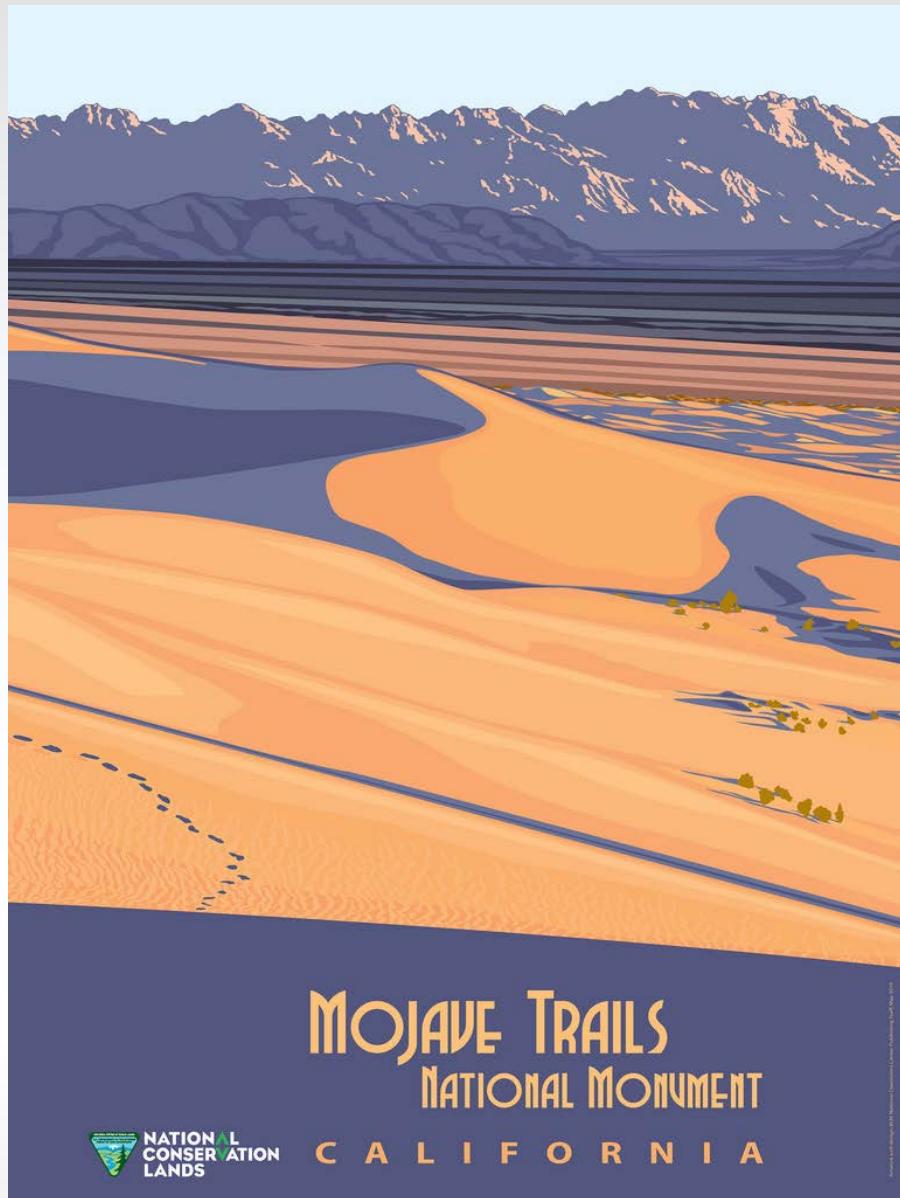
development on public lands

DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

DRECP

DRECP.org



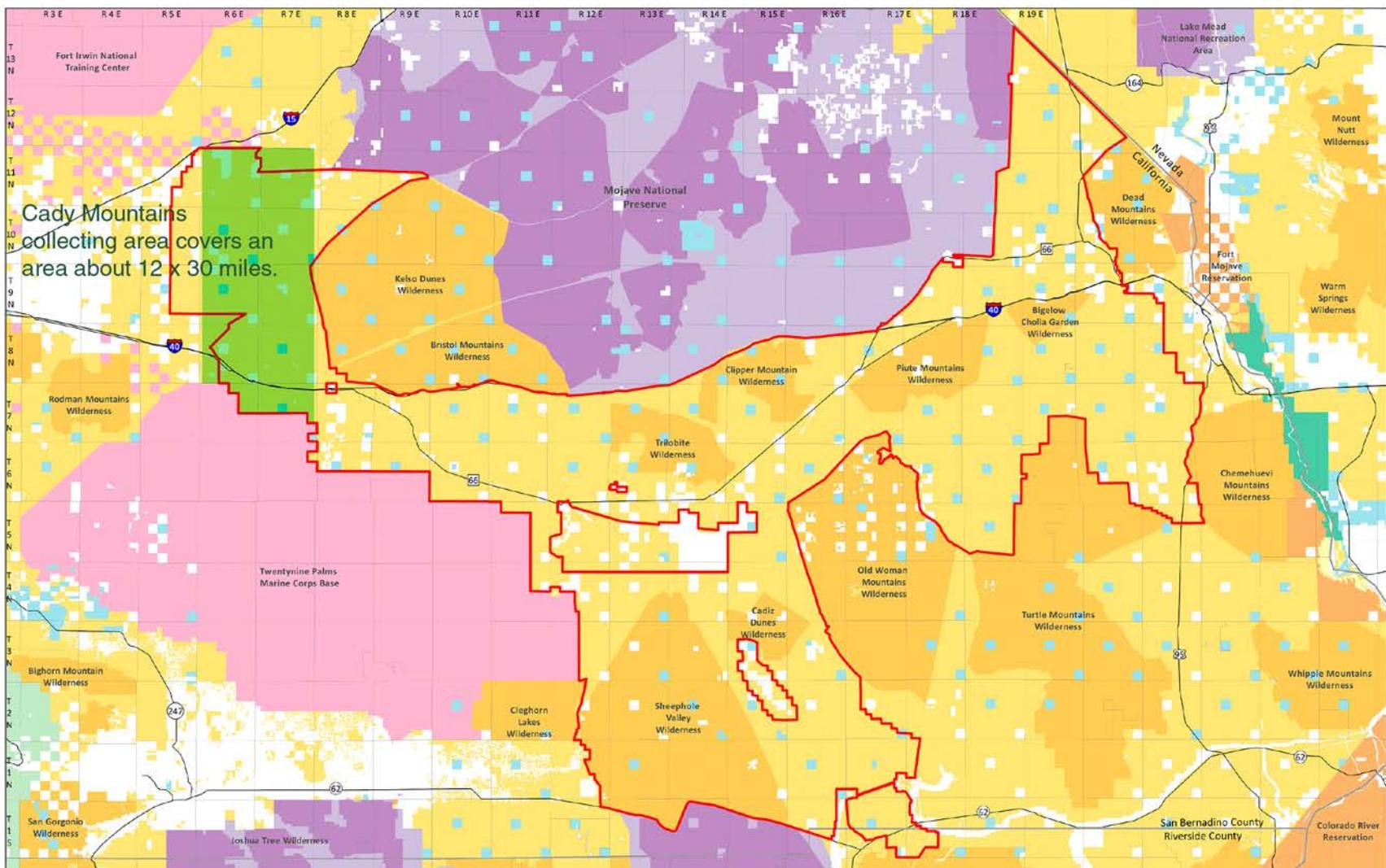


Wilderness and National Monument designations may be the only way to protect public lands from development under sweeping Land Use Amendment Plans like the DRECP.

At Senator Feinstein's urging, on February 12, 2016, President Obama established three National Monuments in Southern California by Presidential Proclamation:

- 1.) Mojave Trails (1.6 million acres)
- 2.) Sand To Snow (154,000 acres)
- 3.) Castle Mountains (<21,000 acres).

Many favorite collecting areas are now within the boundaries of Mojave Trails, including Afton Canyon, Cady Mountains, Cadiz (Siam Siding), most of Lavic Siding, Jasper Hill and other localities.



Land Status

- Department of Defense
- Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Land Management
- Fish and Wildlife Service
- National Park Service
- State
- Bureau of Reclamation
- Forest Service

Mojave Trails National Monument

- NPS Wilderness
- BLM Wilderness



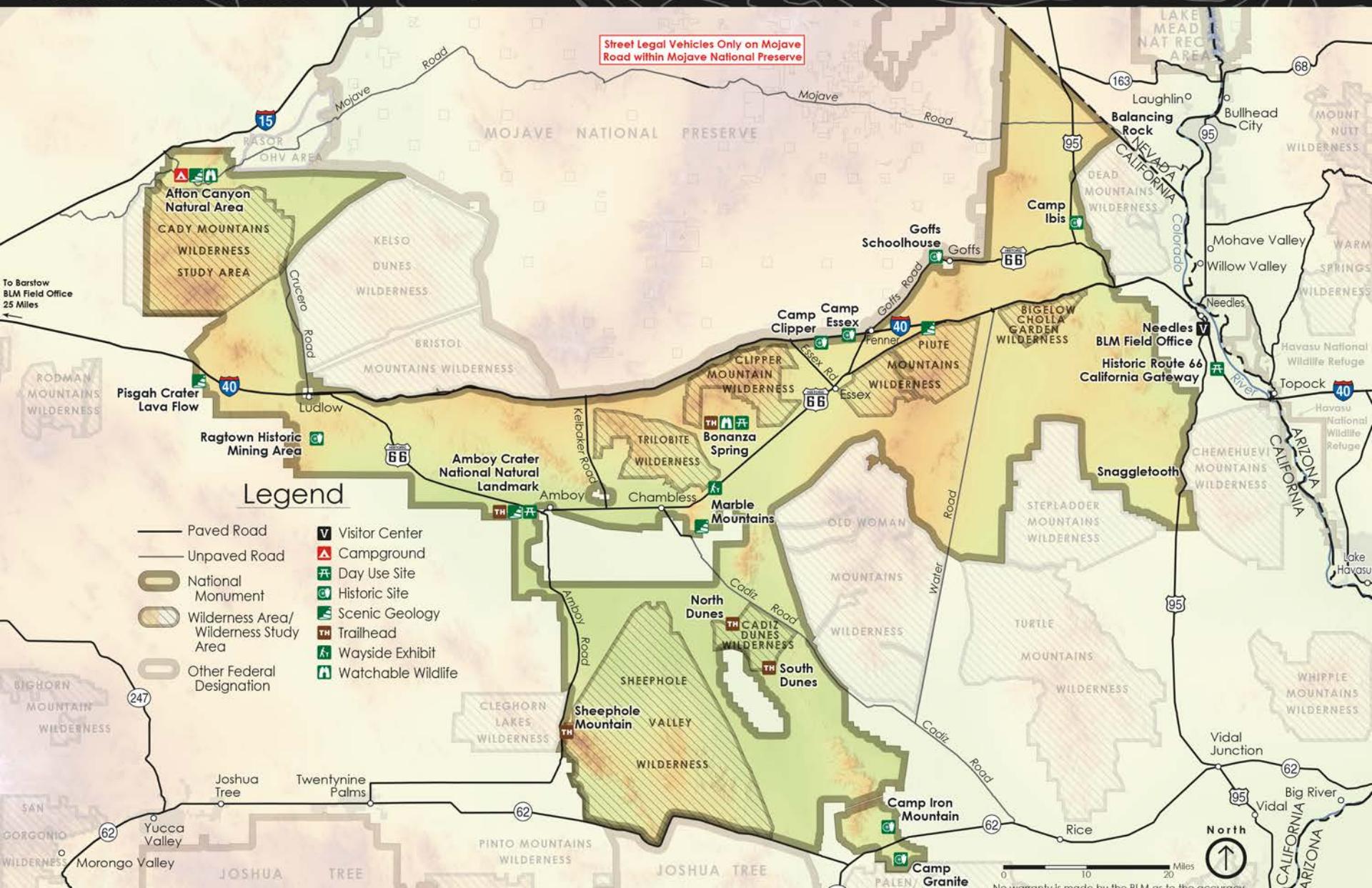
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Mojave Trails National Monument

Mojave Trails National Monument. BLM map. The main rock collecting areas in the Cady Mountains are within the monument. They are distributed over an area of about 12 x 30 miles (see: green rectangular, upper left).



Mojave Trails National Monument



Misperceptions about permissibility of rockhounding in Wilderness Areas and National Monuments

The pro forma language of a Wilderness or NM designation says “no surface-disturbing activity.” However, hobbyist rockhounding or rock collecting may be accommodated at the discretion of the administrative entity (NWPS, BLM, U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service). If such accommodation was extended previously, there is a good chance that it may be allowed in the Final Management Plan as long as the activity does not conflict with the values enshrined in the designation. A Management Plan has to be drafted within three years from the date of the designation/proclamation. The Public must be given opportunity to provide input (comment period).

What's the difference for rockhounds in the two designations?

Wilderness Area. Mechanized vehicles are prohibited, which effectively makes access and packing in/out virtually impossible for most recreational rockhounds.

National Monument. Preserving roads/trails for vehicular access to collecting areas is key.

Mojave Trails National Monument (MTNM)

The “boiler plate” prohibition against surface-disturbing activity articulated in the proclamation is in force until a Management Plan is drafted which specifies exceptions. The administrative agency has the discretion to provide a temporary waiver in the interim.

Because so many significant collecting areas were brought into the MTNM, a furor erupted in the Rockhound community.

On May 13, 2016, California BLM Director Jerome Perez expressly allowed rock collecting to continue in the MTNM (temporarily) while a Management Plan is being drafted.

- LA Times staff writer Louis Sahagun published an article on May 7th about the plight of rockhounds occasioned by the Monument designation. One rockhound was interviewed who reportedly had spoken with Senator Dianne Feinstein and elicited her assurance that she would support accommodation for collecting within NM boundaries, as previously.
- Five days after the LA Times article appeared, Senator Feinstein made good on her promise and wrote a letter to Department of the Interior Secretary Sally Jewell. Her letter was a robust, full-throated endorsement of rockhounding values and a request for accommodation of recreational rockhounding in the NM.



United States Senate
WASHINGTON, DC 20510-0504
<http://feinstein.senate.gov>

May 12, 2016

The Honorable Sally Jewell
Secretary
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, D.C. 20240

Dear Secretary Jewell:

I write today to ask your Department to make appropriate accommodation for continued rockhounding and other rock collecting by hobbyists in any interim and final management plans for Mojave Trails, Sand to Snow, and Castle Mountains National Monuments. The Bureau of Land Management and U.S. Forest Service have long recognized rockhounding as a legitimate recreational pursuit. I deeply appreciate your work in support of the President's proclamations, and I trust that the management planning process will thoroughly examine this issue.

The California desert is a geological wonder: Jagged mountain backdrops jutting up from the expansive alluvial fans, bajadas, and stunning playas that dot the landscape, all of which reveal a pre-historic landscape as old as 2.7 billion years. And this landscape is filled with agate, jasper, opal, chalcedony and quartz crystals. The recreational collection of these items by rockhounds and other enthusiasts not only enriches the public's ability to enjoy and explore the desert, but also serves as a valuable educational tool.

Having heard from the highly dedicated and enthusiastic rockhounding community on this issue, I worked to accommodate their interests in the California Desert Conservation and Recreation Act (S. 414)—the impetus for the President's recent designation of the three aforementioned national monuments. That bill made clear that the Secretary shall continue to authorize rockhounding (*see Sec. 101*).

It is my understanding that the President's proclamations do not prohibit the type of recreational collecting that rockhounds have long enjoyed in this area. Because of

the recent confusion surrounding the authorized uses within these new national monuments, I ask that you confirm the following points in writing:

- Does the President's recent proclamations designating the Mojave Trails National Monument prohibit rockhounding?
- Prior to issuance of the BLM's final management plan for the Mojave Trails and Sand to Snow National Monuments, will the BLM's interim guidance provide for continued rockhounding?

I am confident that the BLM, Forest Service, and National Park Service will continue to support public access and recreation in their management of these national monuments. And I hope that your Department will consider the benefits of allowing continued rockhounding and hobbyist collecting, where suitable.

Sincerely,

Dianne Feinstein
United States Senator

CC: Director Neil Kornze, Bureau of Land Management
Chief Thomas L. Tidwell, U.S. Forest Service
Director Jon Jarvis, National Park Service

DF/kr/ih

What can you do?

Stay informed so you will be ready to submit a comment letter on a Management Plan.

Sign up for USDA Forest Service, BLM, and other Federal agencies' updates to receive email notifications about the places you care about, including:

- <https://www.federalregister.gov> (search all docs going back to 1994)
- <https://www.nationalforests.org/tree-mail>

Subscribe to newsletters/lists to stay informed:

- <http://www.blm.gov/ca/st/en/info/newsbytes/getnb.html> (BLM California News Bytes)
- <http://tinyurl.com/qy85geq> (short url for SDMG eNewsletter)
- Visit the sdmg.org website BLM Resources page frequently.

What can you do?

Show you care: Attend public meetings and hearings and speak up.

It is important for Rockhounds to get their comments formally entered into the record. BLM takes notice when large numbers of Rockhounds show up and speak. Rockhounds have tended to be invisible ([#ghostsof the desert](#)) – they need to elevate their profile (in a positive way) at all levels.



DAC Recreation representative Randy Banis speaks in support of Rockhounds at the May 20th BLM Field Tour, Lavic Siding. Photo: L. Thoresen.



Lisbet Thoresen speaks with Secretary Sally Jewell about rock collecting in National Monuments at the DRECP signing ceremony held in Palm Desert on Sept 14, 2016. Photo: L. Barrett.

What can you do?

Write a comment letter.

The comment period is always short duration and notice about when it starts is sometimes hard to find. Start working on your comment letter as soon as you learn that a new Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA) is in the works. If you or your club signs onto a joint letter, contribute useful factual information to improve it.

Send a copy of everything you submit (digital or hard copy) to American Lands Access Association (ALAA), which is tracking rockhound input on public lands, so we can gauge our effectiveness.

Email your scanned docs or PDFs to: calnatmonuments@amlands.org
OR Smail a copy of your documents to:

ALAA
2010 West Ave. K #528
Lancaster, CA 93536-5229

What goes into a comment letter?

Exposition

- Include a statement about your values (in a respectful tone) and what public lands mean to you. Make it personal.
- Cite facts – be specific and be concise. (Frothy emotion undercuts any good argument.) Factual or processual defects pointed out in the Draft Plan must be redressed by the administrative agency. Such defects so stipulated may provide basis for legal challenge.
- As a member of a CFMS-affiliated club, rockhounds vow to adhere to the Code of Ethics of American Federation of Mineralogical Societies (AFMS).
- Don't be critical about the values of other groups. Conservation values take precedence over recreation and Renewable Energy trumps everything. Be supportive of others' values and point out that recreational rockhounding values are consistent with, not in conflict with conservation values.

What else goes into a comment letter?

Data (exposition is of no value without detailed site information)

- Site name (use a well-known title, it can be an informal, but generally recognized name).
- List the GPS or Lat/Long coordinates or other geo-ref data.
- Maps are great.
- List the materials.
- List bibliographic references (optional, but may help w/ historically significant localities, especially)
- Describe general site information and provide directions, road markers, landmarks, etc for getting to a site. **IMPORTANT!** It won't help if a site is kept "open," but the road to it is "closed" or staging area/parking disappears. Roads not explicitly submitted for inclusion in an MP may be delisted from the final document. Most secondary roads will be closed regardless.

*Make comments targeted specifically at the #1 priority
of the BLM and the Dept of the Interior:
Utility-scale Renewable Energy projects in the desert*

There are excellent resources on the negative impacts of industrializing the desert which also provide cogent arguments on non-transmission alternatives, i.e., Distributed Energy Generation (DG).

- <http://www.basinandrangewatch.org/> (Basin and Range Watch)
See especially: <http://basinandrangewatch.org/RETI2.html>
- <http://www.mojavedesertblog.com/> (Blogger Shaun Gonzales has helped rockhounds with comment letters and information resources.)
- <http://a4dp.org/> (Alliance for Desert Preservation. With the help of DAC member Mark Algazy, A4DP wrote one of the most effective comment letters on the DRECP. A4DP provides a useful model for successful grassroots campaigns.)

Some key arguments: unsustainable economics (e.g., poor ROI, bankruptcies); permanent environmental harm to the desert ecosystem; enormous water and fossil fuel demands to operate utility-scale projects; accountability gap.

A wide-angle photograph of a desert landscape. In the foreground, there's a rocky, uneven ground covered with small, dry shrubs. Beyond the shrubs, the terrain slopes upwards towards a range of mountains. These mountains are rugged with various shades of brown, tan, and grey, indicating different rock types and exposure. The sky above is a clear, vibrant blue with a few wispy white clouds.

“Rooftop solar in the city
keeps the desert clean and pretty.”

– John Martin

Timeline – Mojave Trails NM

We have some time (months).

- Management Plan eta 18-24 months (from ca. Sept 1, 2016).
- SDMG and CFMS will prepare a joint letter. If your organization wants to be a signatory, email: editor@sdmg.org
- **Got maps? Got info?** Help us with area information and travelways. Gather and send in your information ASAP. *If you are good with maps, we want to speak with you.*

Email your scanned docs or PDFs to: calhatmonuments@amlands.org

OR Smail a copy of your documents to:

ALAA
2010 West Ave. K #528
Lancaster, CA 93536-5229

Be sure to save digital copies of everything. Probably, you will re-use parts of letters and information you have gathered previously for future campaigns.

Timeline – San Gabriel Mountains NM

Imminent deadline!

- Comment period ends Oct 17, 2016.
- SDMG and CFMS is preparing a joint letter now. If your organization wants to be a signatory, email: editor@sdmg.org
- **Got maps? Got info?** Help us with area information and travelways. Gather and send in your information ASAP. *If you are good with maps, we want to speak with you.*
- Our deadline for getting information to us or signing onto the SDMG-CFMS letter is: October 10, 2016

Email your scanned docs or PDFs to: calhatmonuments@amlands.org

OR Smail a copy of your documents to:

ALAA
2010 West Ave. K #528
Lancaster, CA 93536-5229

Be sure to save digital copies of everything. Probably, you will re-use parts of letters and information you have gathered previously for future campaigns.

We need help identifying localities on this map.

Contact:
editor@sdmg.org

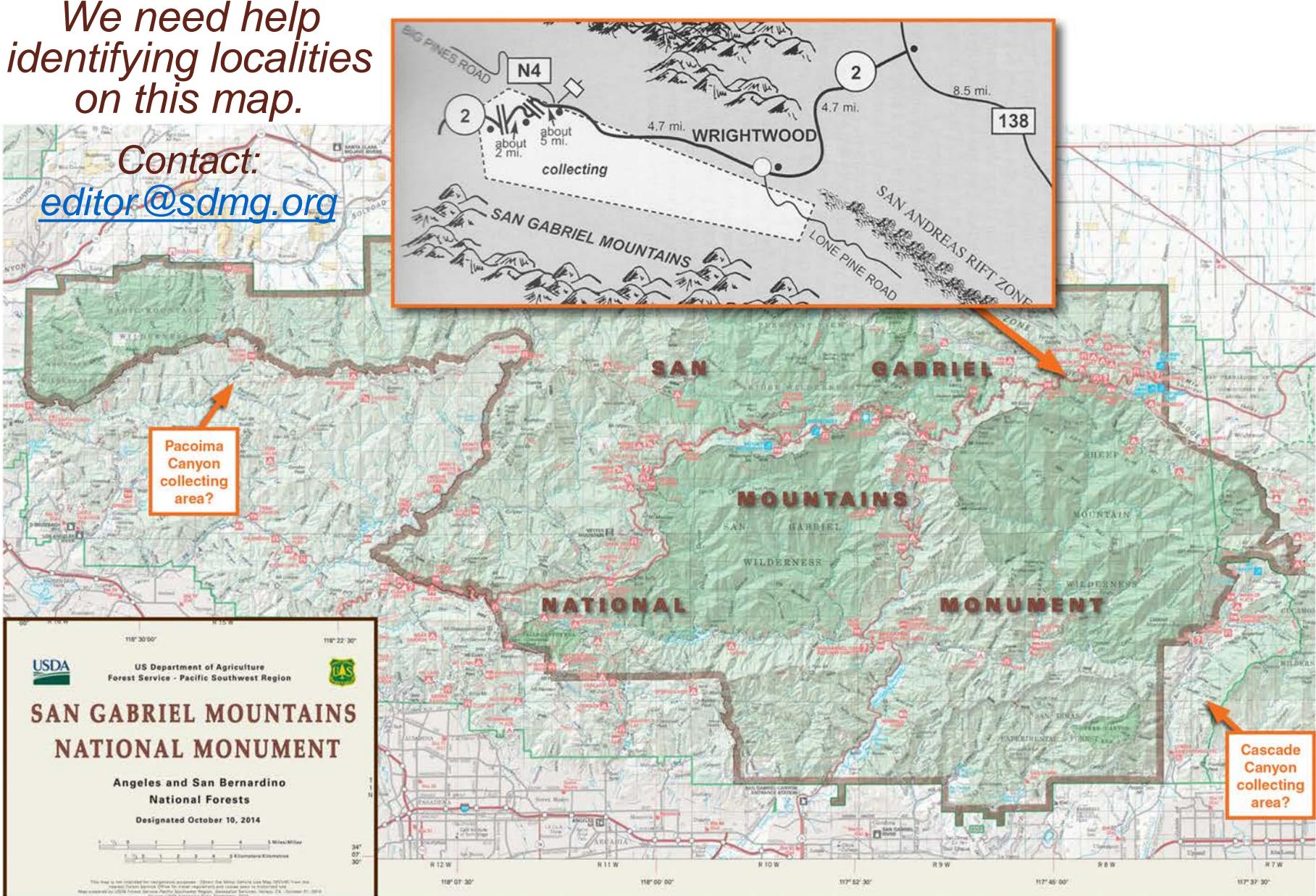


Figure 2. Collecting areas in and around San Gabriel Mountain National Monument. Source: San Gabriel Mountains National Monument Final Map, available at: <http://www.fs.usda.gov/project/?project=46964>, accessed 19 September 2016. **Overset image:** Detail, collecting area west of Wrightwood. Source: J. Mitchell. 2003. *Gem Trails of Southern California*, Second rev. edn. (Upland, California, Gem Guide Book Co.), p. 103.

Thank you.
Lisbet Thoresen
Contact: editor@sdmg.org



Baxter Wash, North Cady Mountains. May 28, 2016. Photo: L. Thoresen