

BLM gives Industry another chance to lay claim to California's deserts

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ON FEBRUARY 1, 2018, the **The Bureau of Land Management (BLM)** announced it will consider amending the **Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan Land Use Amendment Plan (DRECP)** to seek greater opportunities for renewable energy generation.(1) The next day, **BLM** posted a Federal Register notice which initiated a 45-day public comment period.(2)

The review comes less than 18 months after the **DRECP Record of Decision (ROD)** was published and implementation was well under way. According to **BLM**, the review was prompted by “concerns voiced from multiple parties” during the comment period. It is no secret that commercial industry advocates have been lobbying hard to claw back land they lost in the **ROD** to conservation and recreation Stakeholders – including Rockhounds. Industry now has wind in its sails to get it all back, thanks to Executive Order 13783, “Promoting Energy Independence and Economic Growth” (March 27, 2017).

To ensure access to collecting areas is not lost to industrial projects

Rockhounds must reiterate anew their concerns to BLM by the comment period deadline on March 19, 2018

www.federalregister.gov/d/2018-02098

What is DRECP

& why does it matter to Rockhounds?

The **Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP)** is the centerpiece of California's long-range energy planning efforts. It is the largest land use policy amendment in state history. After a contentious eight-year battle over **BLM's** handling of the drafting process and balancing of competing stakeholder values with economic development interests – and 16,000+ comment letters – the **Record of Decision (ROD)** was finally published on September 14, 2016.

The **DRECP** is important to Rockhounds, because it created new land use designations to balance competing areas of interest: conservation, recreation (including hobby collecting), and utility-scale renewable energy projects. Industry is unhappy with the balance set forth in the **ROD**.

According to **BLM's Vicki Campbell**, based on “many detailed comment letters submitted to the DRECP,” the ROD was revised specifically to accommodate Rockhounds where Development Focus Areas (DFAs) for industrial interests conflicted with rock collecting areas.(3) *BTW, SDMG's comment letter enumerated the conflict areas that were changed.*(4)

Industry advocates now have favored status with the **Department of Interior** to undo the **ROD** at the expense of recreational users, including Rockhounds.

If you or your club want to sign a joint letter in support of Rockhounds, contact the author for information at editor@sdmg.org

- 1.) <https://www.blm.gov/california/BLM-to-consider-changes-desert-renewable-energy-conservation-plan> or short url: <https://goo.gl/Cst6Xz>.
- 2.) Docket Number 2018-02098, available online at: <https://www.federalregister.gov/d/2018-02098>
- 3.) Campbell's comments were made on a conference call between DRECP administrators and Stakeholder representatives on September 13, 2016, the day before the ROD was published.
- 4.) SDMG's comment letter was submitted on February 21, 2015. The letter included the results of a survey of nearly 190 rockhound respondents – the SDMG-sponsored survey was produced by Shirley Leeson and Lisbet Thoresen, see: www.drecp.org/draftdrecp/comments/San_Diego_Mineral_and_Gem_Society_comments_2015-02-21.pdf or short URL: <https://goo.gl/mefshB>.