

Jerome Perez
BLM-California State Director
June 14, 2018
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Via Email (jperez@blm.gov, blm_ca_wemo_project@blm.gov)

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Sacramento, CA 95825

cc: Matt Toedtli
Planning and Environmental Coordinator
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Barstow, CA 92311

Subject: FR 2018-05272 – Draft WMRNP LUPA/DSEIS

Exhibit 1: Incorporate by reference the comment letter (6 pages) prepared by Kim (née) Campbell (“KC” or “KCE”) on behalf of American Lands Access Association (“ALAA”) and Searchers Gem and Mineral Society (“Searchers”) on: Public Scoping for the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan EIR/EIS, docketed by DRECP on September 12, 2011, and available online at the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (“DRECP”) website:

https://www.drecp.org/nepaceqa/comments/American_Lands_Access_comments.pdf. (Hereafter “Exhibit 1” or “ALAA/Searchers’s 2011 DRECP letter”)

Exhibit 2: Incorporate by reference the comment letter (5 pages) prepared by American Lands Access Association (“ALAA”) on: DRECP NEPA/CEQA [Docket: 09- RENEW EO-OI], docketed by DRECP on February 19, 2015, and available online at the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (“DRECP”) website:

https://www.drecp.org/draftdrecp/comments/American_Lands_Access_Assoc_comments_2015-02-19.pdf. (Hereafter “Exhibit 2” or “ALAA’s 2015 DRECP letter”)

Exhibit 3: Incorporate by reference the comment letter (48 pages) of February 21, 2015, prepared by San Diego Mineral & Gem Society, Inc. (“SDMG”) on: DRECP NEPA/CEQA [Docket: 09- RENEW EO-OI], submitted to the California Energy Commission on February 23, 2015, and available online at the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (“DRECP”) website:

http://www.drecp.org/draftdrecp/comments/San_Diego_Mineral_and_Gem_Society_comments_2015-02-21.pdf). (Hereafter “Exhibit 3” or “SDMG’s 2015 DRECP letter”)

Exhibit 4: Incorporate by reference the comment letter (6 pages) prepared by Ruth Hidalgo on: DRECP NEPA/CEQA, submitted to the California Energy Commission, docketed on February 23, 2015, and available online at the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (“DRECP”) website:

https://www.drecp.org/draftdrecp/comments/Ruth_Hildago_comments_2015-02-22.pdf. (Hereafter “Exhibit 4” or “Hidalgo’s 2015 DRECP letter”)

Exhibit 5: Incorporate by reference the comment letter (2 pages) prepared by Kyle Beucke on: DRECP NEPA/CEQA, submitted to the California Energy Commission, docketed on February 23, 2015, and available online at the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (“DRECP”) website:
https://www.drecp.org/draftdrecp/comments/Kyle_Beucke_comments_2015-02-23.pdf. (Hereafter “Exhibit 5” or “Beuke’s 2015 DRECP letter”)



Exhibit 6: Incorporate by reference the comment letter (14 pages) of March 22, 2018, prepared by San Diego Mineral & Gem Society, Inc. (“SDMG”) on: BLM proposal to amend the DRECP [FR Doc. 2018-02098], submitted to the Bureau of Land Management on March 22, 2018 and available online at the SDMG public website:
http://www.sdmg.org/blmdocs/SDMG_DRECP_FR2018-02098_letter_20180322.pdf and on the DRECP website at:
https://www.drecp.org/draftdrecp/comments/San_Diego_Mineral_and_Gem_Society_comments_2015-02-21.pdf (Hereafter “Exhibit 6” or “SDMG’s 2018 DRECP letter”)

Exhibit 7: Incorporate by reference a list of 88 rockhounding sites (15 pages) of January 19, 2015, prepared by Randy Banis for American Lands Access Association (“ALAA”) on: Analysis of DRECP Draft EIS/EIR, and available online at at the ALAA public website:
http://amlands.org/media//DIR_113534/DIR_390234/7cfb9fcee974e81ffff80bfffffe905.pdf. (Hereafter “Exhibit 7” or “ALAA Rockhounding sites”)

Exhibit 8: Incorporate by reference the comment letter (24 pages) of February 16, 2015 prepared by Randy Banis on: Draft DRECP and EIR/EIS, submitted to the California Energy Commission, docketed on February 23, 2015, and available online at the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (“DRECP”) website:
https://www.drecp.org/draftdrecp/comments/Randy_Banis_comments_2015-02-16.pdf

Exhibit 9: Incorporate by reference all the route data submitted to BLM on the WEMO routes to gem-mineral collecting areas by Rob Waiwood. (Hereafter “Exhibit 9” or “Waiwood WEMO”).

Exhibit 10: Incorporate by reference all the route data submitted to BLM on the WEMO routes by the DAC and its subcommittee on behalf of Rockhounds. (Hereafter “Exhibit 10” or “DAC WEMO”).

Exhibit 11: Incorporate by reference the letter submitted  a email to BLM-California State Director Jerome Perez by Sheara Cohen () , California Desert Public Lands Representative, The Wilderness Society, on May 30, 2018, on behalf of 38 signatories requesting a comment period extension on FR 2018-05272, with attachments: (filenames) WEMO extension request - 5.30.18 Submitted.pdf; WEMO Data Irregularities - 4.30.18.pdf; WEMO routes GIS issues CBD - 4.26.18.docx (Hereafter “Exhibit 11” or “Cohen et al.”).

Enc A: Spreadsheet provided to Lisbet Thoresen and Kim Erb by Matt Toedtli on gem-mineral collecting areas personally entered into WEMO database by Kim Erb.



[REDACTED]. (Hereafter “Enc A” or “Erb WEMO”)

Enc B: Cady Mts. references provided by Gregor. Includes:
map page of collecting areas and routes from Desert Magazine, 1957,
Desert_Magazine_1957_Baxter.pdf
Literature on collecting areas in the Cady Mts., CADY_history_literature.pdf
WEMO alternative 4 route map of historic collecting areas in the North Cady Mts.,
wemo_cady_north_annotated_map.pdf
(Hereafter “Enc B” or “Cady Mts Gregor”)

Enc C: Spreadsheet provided to Lisbet Thoresen by Matt Toedtli on gem-mineral
collecting areas in WEMO [REDACTED] 2015–2016 database.
[REDACTED] (Hereafter “Enc C” or
“BLM WEMO 2015-16”)

Dear Director Perez:

First, we would like to thank Matt Toedtli (**MT**) and other BLM staff for their prompt responses to our email queries to date related to the Draft DSEIS for the West Mojave Route Network Project and Draft LUPA to the California Desert Conservation Area Plan in the West Mojave Planning Area (collectively “WMRNP”), which is available for public comment through June 14, 2018. Thanks also to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) for hosting the open houses on the West Mojave Route Network Project (WEMO/WMRNP). Mr. Toedtli and project leader Katrina Symons (**KS**) provided an excellent overview of the project history and how to use the maps.

This letter addresses three subject areas related to the WMRNP.

First, this letter memorializes our current understanding and concerns about route data available in BLM’s online interactive maps and the georeferenced PDFs for the four alternative plans. Our remarks are based on using the maps and follow-up email communications with MT and other BLM staff since March 29th, including Peg Margosian (**PM**) and Russell Scofield (**RS**), and also in-person interaction at the April 17th BLM Open House hosted in Victorville with BLM staff, including Matt Toedtli, Stephen Razo (**SR**), Katrina Symons (**KS**), and Craig Beck (**CB**).

Second, we would like to draw your attention to difficulties and problems Rockhounds have encountered using the maps and improvements we think are necessary for enabling rockhounds to provide meaningful input during the comment period. We feel these problems are sufficient to warrant BLM extending the comment period after changes have been administered.

Third, comments provided herein are made with the goal of ensuring maximum accommodation of the low impact recreational activity known as “rockhounding” or “hobby collecting” or “casual collecting” on federal lands. Accommodation means 1.) hobby collecting areas remain open and accessible, 2.) motorized routes of access to them remain open and accessible, and 3.) parking/staging areas are available along these routes near collecting areas, ideally, less than 0.25 miles between parking/staging areas and collecting areas.

We know that collecting areas and routes to them have been identified in numerous comments submitted to BLM and/or its partner agencies (e.g., California Energy Commission) in the past on both WEMO-related and non-WEMO related projects. However, it is unclear to us what is included and what have may been omitted in the maps currently available for comment. We want to ensure that ALL rockhound-related comments submitted in the past on any project whose geographic boundaries or subject-relevance overlay the WMRNP’s geographic boundaries are incorporated into the current WMRNP project, Alternative Plans 3 and 4. Therefore, please find enclosed documents and documents incorporated by reference on collecting areas and routes to them, with collectable materials. For every route and locality described, we ask that motorized access remain open so that rockhounds can continue hobby collecting. We recognize that some comments may duplicate information submitted by others during this comment period.

COMMENTS

1. Sequestering of public comments in information siloes negates their utility.

It is our understanding that public comments previously submitted on other projects, notably DRECP, were not incorporated into the WMRNP maps now available for public comment.[KS, Open House, 4/17/2018] Recently, BLM confirmed to Lisbet Thoresen (LT) that routes for hobby collecting areas submitted in rockhound-specific comment letters to DRECP in 2015 had not been incorporated into the current WMRNP maps. [MT, email, 3/30/18]

For the average member of the public, it is impractical to compartmentalize public comments in project-specific siloes, in effect, having to make redundant efforts of re-submitting the same information over and over again on different projects, for example WMRNP and DRECP, which share or overlap one another on subject relevance, geographic relevance, or other context-relevance criteria.

The interdependency of access to rockhound destinations with motorized routes to them is well-known to BLM. They go hand-in-hand. It does not help rockhounds to have hobby collecting areas open, if motorized routes to them are closed and parking nearby is impossible. Rockhounds habitually emphasize the importance of these inextricable

interdependencies in their comment letters [including but not limited to Exhibits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6]. We had assumed, along with many other rockhounds, that BLM would and should share information assets between the WMRNP and any other projects where such datasets have overlapping or mutually reinforcing relevance, including DRECP. Specifically, we ask BLM to incorporate comments from Exhibits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, 9,10 and Enclosures A, B, C into the WMRNP, Alternative Plans 3 and 4.

Whether public comments were submitted to agencies or entities coordinating a project with BLM but not to BLM directly (i.e., DRECP, where comments were addressed to the California Energy Commission), the criteria for sharing information should be context-relevant and not siloed within agencies or projects. It is a reasonable expectation that BLM should incorporate ALL the relevant data from ALL rockhound comments from DRECP or any other project into the WMRNP maps. Randy Banis called for this logical continuity in his 2015 letter to DRECP, asking BLM to incorporate into DRECP route designations of other projects [Exhibit 8, p. 9]:

“14. DRECP & BLM Route Designations. Although DRECP’s CMA’s may yield new sideboards for future route designations efforts, DRECP should in no way trigger new BLM route designations. I recommend that the Final EIR/EIS incorporate and recognize the NEMO, WECO, NECO and WEMO route designations for the entirety of the DRECP.”

The continuity Mr. Banis called for should be reciprocal between ANY projects with geographic or use-related overlaps.

2. Route+destination data relationships exist in BLM’s database – they need to be carried into the WMRNP maps.

BLM not only has route and destination information in its database(s), but also the agency has attested to having already recognized the importance of the relationships between these data fields for rockhounds:

“We have information on which routes serve rock hounding locations, per public comment from the Searchers member, Kim Erb. It is present in the GIS data under a field meant to capture the types of recreation served by that particular route.”[PM, email, 10/18/18]

Kim Campbell Erb (KCE/KC) provided direct data input into the WEMO database while she served as a member of the DAC (December 2011 – Decmeber 2014). She also coordinated data gathering efforts of many other rockhounds over a period of many months for the WEMO project. KC also prepared rockhound comments for DRECP [ALAA/Searchers’s 2011 DRECP letter, Exhibit 1]. Still more data were also submitted to DRECP by many rockhound advocates were used by BLM to produce user-designated and

special designated areas in DRECP. During a conference call on September 15, 2016 with stakeholder representatives, including Lisbet Thoresen (LT), DRECP Program Manager Vicki Campbell reported that the DRECP ROD featured significant changes departing from the DRECP's Draft Preferred Alternative Plan to accommodate rockhounds where Development Focus Areas (DFA) encroached hobby collecting areas or blocked routes of access to them. Ms. Campbell said these changes were made "based on numerous detailed comment letters from rockhounds." Ergo, rockhound-specific comments must have been flagged/tagged as such to enable BLM to redraw DFAs and make rockhound-sensitive area designations (SRMA, ERMA) in the final DRECP maps. In other words, BLM has already undertaken work that we would expect to see output to the WMRNP maps.

3. Comments that were submitted previously and ARE NOT in the WEMO maps should not have to be re-submitted by users (the public).

LT was advised that users should re-submit comment letters to BLM for the current WMRNP comment period.[KS, Open House, 4/17/18] It is unreasonable to expect users to duplicate previous submittals that BLM already has or should have in its system. As noted above, rockhound-specific records are already tagged in BLM's database.

For some unknown number of users, "original" comment letters are no longer accessible or do not exist. For other users, comments were only ever created by direct input into the official website form handler (in other words, the user never had an original copy of his or her submittal to retain for his or her records). The same situation has been created during the present comment period for which comments can be submitted directly into the online interactive WEMO map. How are users supposed to log (for their own records) their comments submitted via a graphical map interface in case they should have to re-submit their same comments at a future time for another project? In four different maps composed of thousands of route segments? This is not reasonable.

4. Improve navigability of the interactive WMRNP maps.

To be usable and reasonably intuitive users need to be able to isolate activity-specific routes (e.g., rockhounding, ORV) and see feature labels and author labels/ tags. Despite having the necessary data fields and information in its database, BLM has not provided a manageable interface that enables users to isolate activity-specific routes such as a rockhound layer in the WMRNP maps. Nor are users able to see the hobby collecting areas associated with their routes or their user/author. The base maps have limited feature labels to help orient the user to recognizable locations in the maps. These references are necessary for being able to use the maps, given that the data are so voluminous – 15,000 miles of routes composed of 250,000 individual route segments in four alternative maps.

Every set of routes in every Alternative map (where applicable) should show the hobby collecting area/destination related to them – common placenames found in user comments such as “Brown Butte” or “Lavic Siding.” Evidently, multiple users will have commented on some of the same places. Wikipedia is a useful model for showing the thread of revisions made to wikis by different editors (with date stamps).

5. Practical verification of map content.

Users need to see what author-specific data are incorporated into the WMRNP maps, what data are incorrect, and what data may have been omitted. Currently, Rockhounds just don’t know what rockhound-specific comments made it into the maps. Hunting and pecking 250,000 route segments in 90 days is not a reasonable expectation of users.

As noted above, we know that a large number of rockhound-specific records were input directly into the WEMO route database by KC and other rockhounds whose efforts she coordinated during her tenure on the DAC. Former BLM geologist Rob Waiwood (RW) also contributed a lot of data. DAC member Randy Banis (RB) contributed significantly to routes designated for recreational users, including rockhounds. These data should be in the WEMO database, as well. Together with KCE’s and RW’s entries, all these data should have been output to the WEMO maps. Are they there? No way to tell. Without labels it is practically impossible for users to discern what data are there, what data may need correcting, what data may be missing, and what data were provided by whom. We ask BLM to verify that all the data input by KCE, RW, RB, and other contributors to the WEMO Project [Exhibits 9 and 10, Enclosures A and C] are included in the maps for Alternative Plans 3 and 4.

LT advised MT that SDMG’s 2015 letter [Exhibit 3] provided rockhounding inputs that should also be incorporated into the maps for Alternative Plans 3 and 4, which he confirmed would occur. [MT, email, 3/30/18].

ALL authors should be able to verify that their own comments previously submitted to BLM are in the WMRNP maps during the comment period. It does not help us to have this information after opportunity for comment has closed or during the protest period. To enable authors to review the maps, the routes must have tags or author threads, and the routes + destinations must be selectable/viewable in intelligible groupings.

6. Rockhound-centric map/set of maps needed during the comment period.

Points 4 and 5 above can be distilled to a need for a rockhound map or suite of maps. According to BLM’s MT [email, 4/11/18]:

“Closer to the release of the Final EIS, tentatively scheduled for October 2019, we will consult with the field office, district and/or state geologist to determine if and how rockhounding sites will be available on public route maps. It may be decided that it is

better to release as a separate set of maps, rather than on our route-centric subregion maps.”

We agree with KCE’s response [email, 4/11/18]:

“I do not favor waiting until October for a ‘rockhound map’ to be released as it will be too late to comment for those who find it too difficult to figure out if their data was included in the current maps. The BLM should make this process as easy as possible for the public to review and verify. There should already be a rockhound layer as it was in the works several years ago during the WEMO meetings. They *must* be connected to the ‘route-centric’ maps because that is the only way the public will be able to determine if the routes they need are proposed to be kept open. It is essential that the rockhound community in general be provided a reasonable and not overly technical method to determine where their collecting sites are on the maps and if the routes proposed to be kept open will serve those sites.”

6. Private vs. public comments.

BLM has been reluctant to release author-tagged rockhound comments or even acknowledge whether or not data from comments provided by any given author were in fact incorporated into the WMRNP maps. For example, MT demurred from sharing information with LT from SDMG’s 2015 comment letter [Exhibit 3]. (The letter is posted on a federal public website: drecp.org.) Releasing KCE’s information [Enclosure A] required obtaining her explicit permission (see below). (We acknowledge and thank BLM for providing us an Excel spreadsheet containing KCE’s records.)

Several BLM staff (RS, MT) cited respect for rockhounds who may want to keep their favorite collecting areas “secret” like a secret fishing hole. Frankly, this notion that rockhounds mostly want to keep their collecting areas “secret” is inexplicable and is not validated by general practice. On the one hand, BLM’s default position should be consistent with its own website warning to users that their comments may be published on a public (federal) website (for example, Exhibits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6). On the other hand, separate from consistent policy implementation, it should be manifest that there can be no “secret” destinations, because under implementation of the WMRNP there will be no “secret” motorized routes available to the public. This point underscores the need for BLM to publish rockhound maps (see point 5 above).

We agree with KCE’s position in a message written to BLM’s MT [email, 4/11/18]:

“First, I give permission for the public release of all data I submitted regarding locations and routes of interest for the WEMO route plan or any other program such as the DRECP, without reserve or condition. All data I submitted was for the benefit of all rockhounds and was never intended to be kept private. The goal has always been to

keep as many collecting sites open as possible for current and future rockhounds, and routes as necessary for anyone to be able to access them. It is important to keep access for EVERYONE, not only for the most able-bodied who can hike miles in rough and remote terrain.

“Many people other than myself contributed to the WEMO efforts. Few if any expected their data to be kept private. The many people like myself who traveled great distances and gave a significant amount of time to contribute to the WEMO effort would be very upset to know the data is being kept private and cannot be confirmed on the maps. The very nature of public comment is that it is PUBLIC. No waivers were sought at the time the data was contributed and it was understood that the information would be public.”

7. Route and collecting areas to incorporate into Alternatives 3 and 4.

Several Rockhounds have reported that Alternative 4 is their preferred option. We would like to see all rockhound-related comments incorporated into both Alternative 3 and Alternative 4. We are aware that there are numerous route segments overlaying one another, each with their own unique WEMO ID number. We are also aware that the conservation community may ask BLM to consolidate duplicative routes. We ask that BLM incorporate all comments on duplicative routes into the final consolidated route and NOT DISCARD comments on route segments that are discarded after routes are consolidated.

Exhibits 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6.

ALAA Rockhounding sites [Exhibit 7]. We ask BLM to incorporate routes and/or supplement its database with information on the 88 rockhounding sites listed/cited/shown in Exhibit 7. References to published literature is provided in the list for many of these publicly known localities.

Erb WEMO [Enc A]. Excel spreadsheet of data entries for WEMO made at BLM office by KCE.

Waiwood WEMO [Exhibit 9]. We are aware that Rob Waiwood made numerous gem-mineral collecting area inputs into the WEMO database, but these data have not been made available publicly (to our knowledge). We would like these data to be incorporated into Alternatives 3 and 4 of the current WMRNP maps.

DAC WEMO [Exhibit 10]. We are aware that the Desert District Advisory Council and/or its subcommittee(s) submitted copious route data related to gem-mineral collecting areas pre-2016. We would like all these data to be incorporated into Alternatives 3 and 4 of the current WMRNP maps.

Cady Mts Gregor [Enc B]. Annotated maps and literature on historical collecting areas in the North Cady Mts. Please incorporate comments courtesy of Gregor in the maps as follows, and please note his additional comments below about the annotated map enclosed:

- North Baxter Loop road 85542, 90048, 16906.
- Baxter Wash Road 85539, 90046
- Baxter Wash Road to Wilhelm Wash 90046, 116178
- Lost Cabin Wash and camping areas 86683, 116435
- Historic Afton District Road (through the middle of our collecting area, passing the Big Horn Mine, Fluorite Hill, etc 116180, 116179, 85540, 99958, 99955, 116173
- 116168, 99953, 99947 (closed in alt 4) but that gets you back into the heart of the Cadys, so these routes need to be open in Alternative 4.

“The map has a small TN (Top Notch claim belonging to Depue and Sumners). WEMO road **116178** gets access to their claim, so it needs to stay open. Gets you over to the top of Wilhelm Wash and the gold prospects and tunnel.

“There is also small S, SR, HP for the Polk claims using roads **90046** and **116173**.

“Also, anyone familiar with the dugout can see that the numbered roads on the map gets them there.

Every road on the map was established either as a mining road during the 1910s–1940’s or as a rock collecting road during the 1930s–1950s or as a ranching road after the late 1950’s. Originally the rock collectors drove north from Ludlow then cut west to Baxter Wash.”

BLM WEMO 2015-16 [Enc C]. Gem-mineral collecting areas extracted from BLM database and provided to LT.

We sincerely appreciate the hard work that has gone into drafting the WMRNP and producing interactive maps for the public to provide comments. We recognize the interactive maps have powerful functionality that did not exist even a few short years ago. Our goals are to be assured that all relevant data are reflected in the route network and to provide constructive input about difficulties the average user (non-GIS specialist) may have working with the interactive maps.

We agree with the concerns raised in the letter submitted to Director Perez by Cohen et al. [Exhibit 11] on May 30, 2018. The case presented for extending the comment period 90 days, to September 12, 2018, was well-reasoned and well-supported by excellent examples of data defects, discrepancies, and conflicting mileage calculations to warrant BLM reviewing and correcting (where necessary) the route data made available for public comment. We respectfully reiterate our request that BLM consider extending the comment period to provide users adequate time to provide comments after BLM makes needed changes and

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verifies previously submitted rockhound-specific content is indeed in the maps. The WEMO project was long in the making and built on the hard work not only of BLM staff, but also the DAC, especially Kim Erb and Randy Banis, the American Lands Access Association (ALAA), California Federation of Mineralogical Societies, Inc., and many, many rockhound stakeholders.

Therefore, in the light of so many years of effort on the part of so many people, we feel that BLM should host more Open Houses/public meetings at more venues located closer to city centers (e.g., Los Angeles, Orange County) during the comment period to accommodate the many recreational users who work and live in more populous areas and cannot attend the scheduled meeting times at remote locations. They will be left out if you do not make more of an effort to accommodate them. The time to do this is not during the protest period, which seems destined to be more contentious and protracted, if opportunity to comment on the Draft plan is perceived as unduly rushed or so fraught with unresolved questions or usability problems that discouraged public comment.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Lisbet Thoresen

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