

# GEOHERMAL/ALTERNATIVE ENERGY AND TRANSMISSION ELEMENT UPDATE of the COUNTY'S GENERAL PLAN

## FACT SHEET

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Imperial County has received funding from the California Energy Commission's Renewable Energy and Conservation Planning Grant to amend and update the County's General Plan in order to facilitate future development of renewable energy projects. Additional County funding is available should the Commission's grant be insufficient to complete the task. Concurrently with the General Plan update (the Project), the County will implement the goals set by the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) which is under development.

**BACKGROUND.** Since the General Plan's Geothermal/Alternative Energy and Transmission Element was last updated in 2006, there have been numerous renewable projects proposed, approved and constructed within Imperial County as a result of California's move to reduce greenhouse gas emissions, develop alternative fuel resources and implement its Renewable Portfolio Standards (PRS). The County possesses a unique diversity of renewable energy resources in addition to some of the richest, most productive agricultural land in California. It will require innovative, out-of-the-box strategies to achieve the desired level of equilibrium among the various interests including those concerned with the need to develop renewable energy sources, the use of agricultural land, and the environmental impacts.

**CHALLENGES.** There are a number of challenges, unresolved issues and knowledge gaps that will be addressed by the proposed Project. Several potential impediments to future energy development have already been identified and need to be addressed within the framework of current policies.

1. Understanding the various renewable and alternative energy technologies that currently exist in Imperial County as well as those predicted in the future;
2. Identifying areas within the County that may be better suited for projects in terms of avoiding conflict and ensuring that farmland and habitats are not disturbed;
3. Targeting areas around or under the Salton Sea that could be



utilized for renewable energy development and/or habitat conservation;

4. Creating a more defined designation for appropriate transmission corridors;
5. Developing strategies and identifying potential sites for conservation of endangered and threatened species or other species of concern.

In the process of tackling these obstacles and because the General Plan is currently focused on only geothermal, other issues may be identified including:

- Amending the General Plan to include the energy facilities in place since 2006 including geothermal, solar, wind and biomass and potential future projects such as hyper-saline brine ponds, algae or ethanol/biofuel production, and others yet to be identified;
- Addressing conflicts arising from the current policy of placing solar projects, which require more intensive land use, on agricultural land if a Conditional Use Permit (CUP) is granted;
- Identifying potential shoreline habitat complexes and determining areas of the Salton Sea that may be appropriate for future energy projects;
- Including forecasts for renewable generation production in Imperial County and identifying new transmission corridors to meet future demands;
- Aligning the County's General Plan with the Conservation Plan goals and other relevant State/Federal legislation and guidelines.

#### **COLLABORATION AND PUBLIC PARTICIPATION.**

The County and their consulting team will develop a County-wide public outreach program to obtain input from stakeholders who will be affected by the revised Geothermal/Alternative Energy and Transmission Element. The program will include a series of at least three community meetings conducted in various locations.

A community meeting will be held on **Thursday, June 19, 2014** at the following location and time.

- **Ocotillo Community Center, 266 West Imperial Highway, Ocotillo, CA at 2:00 pm**

Outreach will be coordinated with local, state and federal agencies involved with energy transmission, species habitat and the Salton Sea. The program will also include an ad hoc Advisory Group comprised of key stakeholders.

**INNOVATION.** The County possesses a unique diversity of renewable energy resources which will require a careful balancing of energy generation, land use and conservation needs across such diverse landscapes as farmland, desert terrain and the Salton Sea. The Salton Sea is particularly challenging in that the potential for renewable energy production is great but its looming problems will require inventive approaches to protect the environment and water quality while utilizing this vast resource.

#### **ECONOMIC BENEFITS OF RENEWABLE**

**ENERGY.** Energy facilities contribute over 10 percent of the Imperial County's total property tax revenues. Over 1000 new construction jobs have been filled by residents within the last year in an area that suffers from some of the highest unemployment rates in the nation. Millions of dollars in additional tax and other revenues are being generated which improve the ability of the County to provide much-needed services and infrastructure. California is currently receiving over 1000 MW of green energy from the County and is forecasting that this total will grow to almost 6000 MW in the coming years.

**PUBLIC POLICY GOALS.** While Imperial County will play an important role in helping the State meet its aggressive goals to increase production of renewable energy and reduce greenhouse gas emissions, it is also committed to regional conservation planning efforts to identify and mitigate impacts to natural habitats. The goal of the Project will be to facilitate production while balancing the concerns of environmentalists, farmers and other stakeholder interests.