

**The House Committee on Natural Resources
Energy and Mineral Resources Subcommittee
Oversight hearing on Public Lands and our Clean Energy Future**

May 14, 2019

Response to Questions for the Record from Rep. Levin
By Erica Brand, Director of the California Energy Strategy
The Nature Conservancy

1. Ms. Brand, would you be supportive of additional financial and permitting incentives for large-scale clean energy projects in designated zones or focus areas? What sort of incentives do you think would be most effective?

The Nature Conservancy supports and encourages the development of additional financial and permitting incentives for large-scale clean energy projects in designated solar energy zones and development focus areas.

We believe the most important incentives are those that bring certainty, decrease the processing time of permits while maintaining or enhancing environmental outcomes, and increase the cost-competitiveness of development within solar energy zones and development focus areas.

Specifically, we encourage the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) to allocate sufficient staff time and resources to leasing and permitting of clean energy in solar energy zones and development focus areas to increase permitting efficiency and reduce permit timelines.

Further, efficiencies can be gained from creating multi-agency processes or working groups for cooperating on key issues. For example, having a process in place for federal and state agency coordination on wildlife permits (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and state wildlife agencies), cultural resource agreements (tribes and State Historic Preservation Offices), visual resources (National Park Service), and jurisdictional waters (Army Corps of Engineers), can bring efficiency to permit timelines when the need for inter-agency coordination arises because relationships and processes are in place.

In addition, BLM can create templates for plans are typically required for project development, including: Habitat Restoration Plan, Weed Management Plan, Decommissioning Plan, Bird and Bat Conservation Strategy, Emergency Response Plans, and Groundwater Management Plan.

Finally, the Bureau of Land Management should maintain current financial incentives in place, i.e., retain longer phase-in period for the MW capacity fee. In addition, BLM should establish a longer phase-in period for rental rates in in leasing areas within solar energy zones or development focus areas.

2. Ms. Brand, do you believe that the Trump Administration is dedicating enough staff and funding to renewable energy programs? Would increased funding and leadership from the Bureau of Land Management, for example, spark more interest in clean energy development on public lands?

While we appreciate the Administration making the Bureau of Land Management program for renewable energy a priority in the FY20 budget, we believe more resources are needed in terms of planning and staffing levels to deliver on expansion of responsible development of renewable energy on public lands.

Increased funding can support the staff time needed to process applications and permits for projects in solar energy zones and development focus areas to ensure that permit efficiencies are realized. It can also support designation of additional designated zones in key regions where existing zones are full, such as southern Nevada.

Increased funding can support new science-based planning to support the responsible development of renewable energy and clean technologies on public lands.

Finally, we recommend that BLM focus existing resources on implementing the responsible renewable energy programs that have been put in place on public lands, including adaptive management. Specific to California, we encourage BLM to ensure that the Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) has sufficient funding and staffing to process applications in development focus areas and implement adaptive management that can support innovation at the local level to improve achievement of the plan's conservation and clean energy outcomes.

Further, we recommend that BLM re-establish the national Renewable Energy Coordination Office (RECO) and ensure that there is enough RECO staffing in BLM State Offices in states with significant renewable energy resource potential.

We appreciate the attention of Congress on this important issue of resources needed to implement existing the land use plans that have been adopted for these purposes.