

**Boulevard Planning Group**  
**(formerly known as the Boulevard Sponsor Group)**  
**P.O. Box 1272**  
**Boulevard, CA 91905**

January 4, 2007

VIA e-mail: Brenda\_Hudgens-Williams@blm.gov  
and certified mail

Director (210)  
Bureau of Land Management  
Attention: Brenda Williams  
P.O. Box 66538  
Washington, DC 20035

**PROTEST LETTER: EASTERN SANDIEGO COUNTY PROPOSED RESOURCE MANAGEMENT PLAN AND FINAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT-NOV 2007**

Dear Director,

Our elected community planning group voted 7-0-0 at our January 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2008 meeting, to send this letter. Please consider this a formal protest letter in response to the ESDC RMP EIS noted above, which is dated November 2007. The notice was reportedly placed in the Federal Register on December 7, 2007. Our original comment letter on the Draft document, with 33 attachments, was submitted on May 31, 2007, via certified mail and e-mail to the El Centro BLM office. We also sent a letter to the BLM (11-11-05) protesting the Right-Of-Way/grant to PPM Energy for wind testing on 17,616 acres of the planning area, without public notice, at a time when renewable energy was not an allowed use, and prior to the Wind Energy Development Program and ROD in December 2005. We hereby incorporate those previously submitted comments/documents as part of this protest record. Most of our concerns have been brushed off with inadequate boiler plate responses saying 'this will be dealt with later on a case-by-case basis'. However, this land use change, ushering in industrial uses, will hang over our community's head forever. This will require property owners to fully disclose this industrial zoning to potential buyers which has the real potential to reduce property values for a currently scenic area where no industrial uses are allowed.

We want to go on record, again, as protesting Alternative E as the Preferred Alternative and, again, as supporting Alternative C which better promotes preservation, conservation and protection of our public lands, natural, and cultural resources. Those resources include vast uncluttered panoramic views, which will be protected in Alternative C by denying potential development of industrial wind energy facilities. The currently existing soul-soothing views and our rural community character are highly valued and worth protecting. We also support Alternative C's zero acreage available for geothermal leasing, and increased acreage designated for the In-Ko-Pah and Table Mountain Areas of Critical Environmental Concern.

**The following comments are listed in the order they appear in the document, not necessarily in order of priority:**

**Vegetative Communities, Wildlife, and Special Status Species:**

The October 2007 firestorms in San Diego County have left the majority of the ESDC planning area unscathed—for now. However, the over 290,000 acres of habitat that burned in just the Witch Creek Fire, the Harris Fire, and the McCoy Fire has forced wildlife to move to areas that have not yet burned. The earlier Pines Fire (Sept 2007) and the Horse Fire (July 2006) took out another 19,000 acres of local habitat (see attached San Diego County wildfire documentation). We are seeing more deer, mountain lions, and other wildlife moving into the ESDC planning area and surrounding areas due to these cumulative destructive fire events. This places an even greater value on conservation and protection of now much more reduced and fractured habitat throughout San Diego County, especially so in this planning area.

### **Water Resources Management:**

Page ES-42 notes that, “...there are several groundwater basins within the Planning Area, however, they are considered to be ‘low use basins’”. Since the Draft EIS was released for review, a new developer, Lansing Companies, has announced plans for intense development of approximately 2,200 acres known as Big Country Ranch which is located at the north end of Ribbonwood Road in Boulevard. This property is just west of McCain Valley (see attached letter from Lansing Companies). The new owner also claims to have a lease on 16,000 acres of adjacent BLM land. If allowed to proceed, this large-scale development would put drastic pressure on the groundwater basin underlying both BLM and private lands.

### **Wildland Fire Management:**

*This information needs to be updated to now include the October 2007 firestorms. The ESDC planning area now contains one of the oldest, heaviest, and most volatile fuel loads in existence in San Diego County.* Due to the direction that Santa Ana Winds blow from the Northeast to the Southwest, any fire event starting in the planning area has the potential to do significant damage to residential areas just west of McCain Valley and to the community of Boulevard which straddles I-8 to the Southwest of McCain Valley, along with tribal communities on the Campo Reservation, La Posta Reservation and the Manzanita Reservation.

### **Wildland Fire Ecology:**

At page ES-89, under Preferred Alternative E, the FEIS states that, “Lands and realty-related facilities would: result in ground disturbance and increased opportunities for accidental human-caused ignition; more structures to protect; more hazards and restrictions to prescribed burning; ROWs, utility corridors, and other such authorizations inadvertently create fuel breaks and provide access routes for wildfire suppression.” It is important to note that unless utility corridors, and ROWs are regularly cleared, they may become overgrown with invasive grasses which tend to be even more volatile than native cover. At page 2-46, the FEIS notes that, “The invasion of non-native species and unnatural fire regimes has increased the risk of high intensity catastrophic fires with rapid rates of spread”. When the utility corridors and ROWs are cleared they can increase fugitive dust emissions, particulates, and erosion. **We would like to formally request that no chemical weed killers or herbicides be used in the Planning Area based on the potential negative impacts to ground water quality, and to surface water through storm water runoff.**

### **Special status Species Management - Quino Checkerspot Butterfly:**

*Our previous comments noted concern for the Quino Checkerspot Butterfly. Your EIS failed to include the two fairly recent Quino sighting reports. For the record we must note that those two federally required Quino surveys for the ongoing Campo Landfill SEIS (2005), located on the Campo Reservation, and the Navy Seals Warfare training facility (2004), located on La Posta Road, both resulted in documented Quino sightings.* Both locations are close to the ESDC planning area. The potential for connectivity exists between the planning area, the Campo Landfill site, the local Navy site, the recognized Jacumba Occurrence Complex, and habitat to the west, which burned. The recent fires have further reduced critical habitat that has not already been lost to fire and development. Although the FEIS does state that suitable habitat was noted in the planning area, no Quinos were detected. It is important to recognize and acknowledge that both the years cited by the BLM for the surveys were drought years which does have an impact on Quinos. Based on the October 2007 firestorms, the BLM needs to recognize the increased importance of the remaining habitat of endangered Quino Checkerspot Butterfly and the potential damage that will be done by designating industrial zoning for wind turbines in the McCain Valley area. Specific Quino related comments were submitted by the Center for Biological Diversity (11-11-05) and comments from the Law Offices of Stephan Volker, on behalf of Backcountry Against Dumps (5-31-07).

### **Visual Resources:**

At page 3-95, under the McCain Valley heading, the FEIS states that, “*The level of surface disturbance, loss of vegetative cover and resulting visual contrast are valid reasons for reclassifying the highest use areas as VRM III.*” We find it incredibly ironic that the area selected by PPM Energy for their wind facility, and Airport Mesa, with geothermal potential, are the only locations in our area that are being recommended for a downgrade in classification. Without the downgrade, those industrial uses would not be allowed.

**At page 3-136 under the screening criteria used in developing the model for wind energy potential, number 4 states that, the “Site must be compatible with wind energy development; scenic areas, view-sheds and non-development regions must be eliminated”. Based on the scenic value and our prized and highly valued viewshed, we hereby strongly object outright to the proposed VRM classification downgrade proposed for McCain Valley and Airport Mesa. We especially object to that proposal being based on minor surface destruction and activities. The high-value long-distance panoramic vistas should not be allowed to be forever destroyed to benefit for-profit industrial wind energy and or geothermal investors. These proposed negative actions would be deemed a significant irretrievable/irreplaceable loss of visual resources**

### **Visual Resource Management:**

**The BLM’s responsibility to manage the scenic resources of the public lands is established by law:**

- **The Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976 (FLPMA)** states, “...public lands will be managed in a manner which will protect the quality of the scenic (visual) values of these lands.”
- **The National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA)** requires that measures be taken to “...assure for all Americans...aesthetically pleasing surroundings....”

**This responsibility is reinforced by BLM’s mission statement:** “It is the mission of the Bureau of Land Management to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of present and future generations.”

We fail to see any photographic evidence of the destruction that the VRM Classification downgrades are reportedly based upon. It is interesting that one of the VRM reviewers listed on the chart at page 5-155, John Johnson, managed to increase his experience from 1 to 3 years in a span of only nine months between the release of the DEIS and the FEIS.

We call into question the impartiality/ fairness of another reviewer who made the call for VRM Classification downgrade, Lori Jones Woods. According to documents available on the internet, Ms. Woods is a principal (part owner) of ReCon Inc, ([www.recon-us.com](http://www.recon-us.com)), the consulting firm involved in writing these NEPA documents. ReCon does lots of government work and there is a concern that this fact alone could represent an incentive for Ms. Jones to slant the document to accommodate/ support BLM's pre-selection of the McCain Valley site allowing wind energy development in the very location chosen by PPM Energy. In order to get more jobs, consulting companies learn quickly that they need to bolster the reporting agency's position if they want to be hired again in the future. No doubt, this reality was not far from Ms Jones mind while she was making the decision to justify the VRM downgrade. It is also interesting that Ms. Woods job experience remained the same 27 years in both the DEIS and the FEIS, while Mr. Johnson's experience was upgraded.

**Attached are some photographs documenting the beauty and vast uncluttered views and open space of McCain Valley courtesy of our group member Bill Parsons.**

Wind -driven turbines are generally placed along ridges and other high ground to reap the wind. In scenic areas like ours, such placement is doubly detrimental to viewsheds. Not only are the ridges highly visible from the greatest distances, but they are also prime examples of exposed geologic features. McCain Valley is known for its large and unusually shaped granite monoliths. These thousands of unusual boulders are prominent along the scenic ridges and high points of the Valley. The same areas are potentially preferred Quino habitat and prime targets for industrial turbines. The selection of these highly scenic and highly visible locations will result in the destruction of two of the most beautiful and compelling aspects of McCain Valley—the spectacular views and the magnificent boulders

We strongly object to the downgrading of 9,253 acres to Class III, in the preferred Alternative E, the majority of which is specifically proposed to accommodate an existing BLM client, PPM Energy. We also object to downgrading another 51 acres to Class IV. We again stress the significant importance of keeping the VRM Class II designation to preserve our panoramic viewsheds from a variety of locations within and outside the Planning Area. We strongly oppose the degradation of our unimpaired vistas, the loss of which we believe will result in an irreversible/irretrievable loss.

This VRM downgrade will usher in the PPM Energy Wind project which they have been actively planning and pursuing at the McCain Valley site. As stated before, *we have documented indications that the McCain Valley West site was pre-selected, in violation of NEPA, to “accommodate renewable energy”*. Our DEIS comment letter (5-31-07) included quotes from PPM Energy's Brian Kunz' regarding how they, “*ended up focused on the McCain Valley*” (e-mail dated 8-18-06 included as Exhibit 9 in our DEIS comment attachments).

*Pre-selection of a site is a violation of NEPA as noted in our DEIS comments and comments submitted by the Law Offices of Stephan Volker on behalf of Backcountry Against Dumps.* Even under VRM Class III designation the objectives at page 2-57 state that, “The level of change to the characteristic of the landscape should be moderate. *We have yet to understand how anyone can contemplate that the installation of hundreds of industrial wind turbines which stand hundreds of feet tall, with spinning blades and flashing strobe lights, can remotely be considered a moderate change to an existing uncluttered landscape and view.* We also object to the downgrade in VRM classification for the Airport Mesa area. Again, surface disturbance and activity by target shooters and law enforcement at the border do not impact the distant panoramic views which are present.

*The FEIS statement at Page 4-69, under the degradation / alteration header, that “Since renewable energy generating*

*facilities would only be allowed in VRM Classes III and IV there would be minimal effect on visual resources due to the relatively small amount of area classified as Classes III and IV, except in Alternative D.” It is critical to note that the proposed Class III designation for McCain Valley, in the Preferred Alternative E, is concentrated on 8,560 acres near the rural community of Boulevard and adjacent to existing residential areas. Therefore, the landscape altering impact to a currently uncluttered viewshed is considered an irretrievable, and irreversible loss of visual resources, resulting in a disproportionate significant adverse impact*

At page 5-105, in response to concerns over the DEIS statement that VRM classification downgrades were being made “*to accommodate renewable energy development*”, the FEIS states that the “*quoted sentence has been removed*”. Just removing the statement from the document does not remove or change the intent. The reality is that the VRM downgrades would not be proposed were it not for proposed industrial energy facilities for those very sites.

### **Mineral Resources - Leasables:**

*We strongly object to the proposed designation of 7,607 acres for geothermal leasing in the Preferred Alternative E. We prefer the zero acreage available in Alternative C.* As noted in our DEIS comments, and those from other comment letters, the Planning Area is completely reliant on fragile and vulnerable aquifers, with little recharge. There is no access to any imported water. Geothermal facilities built to produce alternative energy require massive amounts of water and a viable disposal option for potentially hazardous brine—neither of which exist anywhere within the ESDC Planning Area. At ES-47, Saleable, includes the statement that a high potential for construction materials (sand and gravel) exists in area of public land in McCain Valley and that crushed rock is needed in eastern San Diego region, but access is restricted. We must note that removal of sand or gravel deposits in this area will reduce valuable ground water recharge and storage capacity and will be strongly challenged.

### **Recreation Management Area Allocations:**

We support the designation of 42,673 acres as the Boulevard / Jacumba Destination SMRA, however, we object to the lack of any proposed improvements to serve the public and to entice tourists, or increase in staff and enforcement

### **Public Health and Safety:**

We strongly urge that wildland fires be added to this list of public health and safety issues. And with the inclusion of proposed industrial wind energy facilities in McCain Valley, and the necessary transmission infrastructure that goes with them, that the potential of downed powerlines, shedding turbine blades, ice throw from turbine blades, collapsed turbine towers, and turbine explosions be added to the list. The FEIS document does note at ES-77 that, “Authorizations or leases could result in closing of areas for public access (i.e. geothermal, wind, solar) as a result of public safety concerns.

### **Transportation and Public Access:**

Although it was requested in numerous DEIS comments, we could not find in the FEIS the actual amount of land that is projected to be withdrawn from public access to accommodate potential / proposed renewable energy projects—based on public health and safety concerns noted above.

### **Lands And Realty Management:**

We oppose the disposal of 490 acres of public land in the preferred Alternative E and support the zero acres proposed for disposal in Alternative C. We also question in what manner the public is notified of potential sale of public lands.

### **Rights of Way:**

Again, we strongly object to the controversial handling of the ROW which granted wind testing permits issued to PPM Energy for McCain Valley, Table Mountain, and more, totaling over 17,600 acres. We support the restriction of new utility ROWs to the existing designated utility corridor. Introduction of major new transmission lines and / or other intrusive industrial infrastructure into these well-loved scenic wildlands are strongly objected to. They take away from the natural landscape and the user's experience. If you want to see more powerlines just go back to the city.

### **Renewable Energy:**

The DEIS and FEIS both fail to show a specific *need* other than a congressional mandate for the BLM to provide more land for renewable energy. The California Public Utilities Commission is currently debating the topic of whether an increase in mandated renewable energy is even a necessity at this time. Regional utility companies and the *foreign-owned* companies of renewable facilities who would be profiting from this proposed management plan have never shown that there is a *need* for renewable energy designations in this Planning Area. They have only shown that renewables could be available should a new management plan be adopted. The BLM has chosen to blindly ignore the fact that the *need* for renewable energy designation in this RMP has never been proven. For the record, we do support more renewable energy projects in the urban use basin on existing and or new buildings, projects, structures, etc.

(see the attached Kettle Foods wind turbines article 10-26-07 or online at:

[www.environmentalleader.com/2007/10/26/kettle-foods-powers-potato-chip-facility-with-wind-turbines/](http://www.environmentalleader.com/2007/10/26/kettle-foods-powers-potato-chip-facility-with-wind-turbines/) - 36k

and the attached Kyocera article 6-23-05, or online at [http://americas.kyocera.com/news/news\\_detail.cfm?key=1155](http://americas.kyocera.com/news/news_detail.cfm?key=1155).

And the attached UCSD solar panel article from September 2007, or online at:

<http://ucsdnews.ucsd.edu/newsrel/general/09-07KyoceraSolarPowerKP-L.asp>

***While we appreciate the reduction in proposed acreage made available for wind energy development, we strongly object to the 6,931 acres made available for such in the Preferred Alternative E. We do strongly support the zero acreage made available for wind energy development in Alternative C.*** We support the disallowance of wind and / or solar energy development in VRM Classes I and II. We support the exclusion of Airport Mesa for renewable energy. We strongly object to making any land available in this Planning Area for ***“growth, production, or conversion of biomass materials to energy products”***. This objection is based on the total lack of imported water, and the potential for overdraft and / or contamination of priceless fragile and vulnerable high desert aquifers which have little recharge, the potential for negative impacts to air quality, and the industrialization of rural areas, including increased truck traffic, with virtually no infrastructure. It appears that the Maps 3-14 and Map 2-29 contradict each other in regards to lands available for wind energy development. ***While there are maps for every other alternative, no map appears to be available to show lands available for wind energy development under Alternative C.***

### **Utility Corridors:**

The BLM is applauded for not designating any additional utility corridors for the planning area beyond the existing designation south of I-8, near Jacumba, and restricting the width of that corridor to 1 mile, down from the current 2 miles. However, according to the DOE/EIS 0386 (October 2007) for the Designation of Energy Corridors on Federal Land in 11 Western States, the width could be further reduced. We would support the maximum reduction in width and request that the federal energy corridor (DOE/EIS 0386) be denied for multi-modal use which would allow for fuel pipelines through areas federally designated as Sole Source Aquifers due to their fragile nature and lack of imported water options (see attached comment letter to the DOE dated 1-4-08)

### **Planning Criteria:**

At pages 1-12 & 1-13, the FEIS states at number 5 that: “The plan will set forth a framework for managing recreational activities in order to maintain existing natural landscapes and to provide for the enjoyment and safety of the visiting public.” And at number 13, that: ***“Visual Resource Management classifications will be conducted to address the public’s concerns about open space and natural vistas.”*** We ask that you take our concerns for our open space and highly valued natural vistas as priority over for-profit industrial wind energy production for the benefit of investors. There are many other ways to develop and use alternative energy within the urban use basins, including newer small turbines which can be attached to a building’s fascia or roof edging (see attached Kettle Foods article 10-26-07) and solar roofing, without destroying public lands and treasured uncluttered landscapes and open spaces.

### **Conclusion:**

It is our strong opinion that this FEIS does not adequately protect our highly valued visual resources, our non-industrial rural community character, our vast and panoramic open spaces, our much reduced remaining and critical habitat for the Quino Checkerspot Butterfly and other special status species, public health and safety, or public access. We strongly feel that it is unconscionable to downgrade the VRM classifications, without valid justification, in order to accommodate industrial zoning to benefit for-profit renewable energy facilities in a highly scenic area which has no existing transmission infrastructure and is located in a high risk fire zone with only minimal fire fighting resources. We also strongly believe that our community will be subjected to a disproportionate negative impact due to the concentration of wind generation being allowed on almost 7,000 acres in McCain Valley. This VRM downgrade improperly pre-selects PPM Energy’s chosen site for wind generation, leaving no viable alternative locations. We see this action as a violation of NEPA. Our group supports more renewable energy development in the urban use basins to avoid destruction of, and denied access to, our valued public lands and to reduce the reliance on extended and remote generation facilities and vulnerable transmission lines.

Sincerely,

Donna Tisdale, Chair  
619-766-4170  
[donnatisdale@hughes.net](mailto:donnatisdale@hughes.net)

attachments:

Lansing Companies letter (11-2-07), 1-page  
McCain Valley photo album  
Kettle Foods small turbine article (10-26-2007), 1-page  
Kyocera solar tree article (6-23-05), 2-pages  
USCD solar panel article (9-24-07), 2-pages  
San Diego County wildfire documentation, 6-pages

Comment letter on DOE / 0386 (1-4-08)