

# NEWS RELEASE

March 10, 2010

## Conservancy Identifies Available Land for California to Increase Renewable Energy Goals

Contact: David Myers, Executive Director, The Wildlands Conservancy  
April Sall, Conservation Director, The Wildlands Conservancy  
Joan Taylor, Chair, Sierra Club Desert Energy Committee

The Wildlands Conservancy (TWC) inventoried over 225,000 acres of primarily disturbed and degraded lands along major transmission corridors on which the owners support renewable energy development. This is almost twice the 128,000 acres the California Energy Commission said is needed for California to meet its 2020 goal of being 33% reliant on clean renewable solar energy. Elden Hughes, honorary vice-president of the Sierra Club, stated, "The Wildlands Conservancy's inventory will take pressure off destroying our pristine Bureau of Land Management (BLM) lands." Joan Taylor, Chair of the Sierra Club's Desert Energy Committee, remarked, "We have been saying all along that there are enough impacted lands to meet our state renewable energy goals. Now we have an inventory that proves it."

TWC became involved in finding alternative locations for solar projects after lands TWC purchased for conservation were subsequently opened for solar applications by the Bush Administration. When TWC donated these lands, representing the largest land gift in American history, President Bill Clinton, Vice President Al Gore, and Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt promised the lands permanent protection. In December 2009 Senator Dianne Feinstein introduced a bill to create the 941,000 acre Mojave Trails National Monument to ratify this federal protection of what Gore called "some of the most pristine and scenic desert lands in the world."

For eighteen months, TWC's staff has been meeting with land owners, renewable energy firms, and power companies to quantify acreages available for renewable energy. During the inventory TWC staff contacted over 57 landowners and renewable energy firms that have solar and wind project proposals on private land. TWC staff also met with three water and utility agencies that have enough impacted lands available or proposed for solar development to reach California's 2020 goal of using 33% renewable energy.

1. In 2009, TWC hired a consulting firm to evaluate the solar potential of the Westlands Water District (WWD). WWD has 90,000 acres of farmland available for the placement of solar projects. In a meeting with Tom Birmingham, WWD's General Manager, TWC lent support for WWD's willingness to fallow land it bought from farmers for solar development to create improved water reliability for the remaining 500,000 acres in the water district. An additional 17,000 acres

- in the WWD owned by farmers is proposed for solar development. WWD land is along existing transmission corridors from Los Angeles to Sacramento, next to Interstate 5 in California's Central Valley, which has substantial solar insulation.
2. Today at TWC's Oak Glen Preserve, the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power announced the formal abandonment of a power line proposal through two of TWC's preserves. LADWP will pursue its renewable energy goals on 32,000 acres of disturbed lands on Owens Dry Lake where the City has existing transmission corridors. April Sall, Conservation Director of TWC noted, "The Wildlands Conservancy has long supported solar on a portion of Owens Dry Lake which has a substantial restoration element. This project takes pressure off imperiled species that would be severely impacted by projects on pristine Bureau of Land Management lands."
  3. Jesse Montañó, Assistant General Manager of the Imperial Irrigation District, said there are 4,000 megawatts of renewable energy projects in development within the District. The 3,000 megawatts of solar and 1,000 megawatts of geothermal represent one fifth of California's 2020 goal of 20,000 megawatts.

TWC inventoried over 15,000 acres of abandoned alfalfa farms in the Antelope Valley region available for solar. This includes the 4,600-acre Arciero Ranch that is under option for solar development to John Musick. Mr. Musick, representing Arciero Ranch, noted, "This is the future of solar in the West. We must repurpose these abandoned lands throughout America rather than destroy our public land treasures." The Arciero Ranch abuts the Beacon Solar LLC/NextEra Project on an adjacent 3,500 acres of abandoned alfalfa fields. [Mr. Musick can be reached at (970) 925-1900.] TWC has broadly supported these Antelope Valley projects on degraded lands and David Myers, Executive Director of TWC, was a guest speaker at the dedication of California's only utility scale power tower built by E-Solar in Lancaster.

Lorelei Oviatt, Kern County's Special Projects Division Chief, stated, "Clearly, there is enough impacted private land out there to take care of our renewable energy needs. Private land projects may look small when evaluated individually, but they add up. In Kern County there are 16 projects under application totaling over 20,000 acres and 2,200 megawatts." TWC is offering up to 30,000 acres of its Kern County habitat preserves as mitigation to help fast-track these renewable energy projects.

San Bernardino County Supervisor Neil Derry observed, "These private land projects benefit county property tax rolls and don't require taking hundreds of thousands of acres off the tax roll for mitigation because they substantially don't have endangered species issues. They create much needed jobs closer to population centers without the county having to expand infrastructure to remote locations. They're a win-win for the county."

During the inventory, TWC visited several of Edison Mission Energy's private land utility scale solar project sites that were recently sold to First Solar. TWC has broadly

backed the former Edison Mission Energy Projects that are primarily on disturbed agricultural lands and has offered First Solar its support for the former Edison projects. TWC salutes Edison International, Southern California's largest Public Utility, for their support for the Feinstein Desert Protection Act of 2010.

Thomas Dinwoodie, the Founder and Chief Technological Officer of Sun Power, one of the world's largest photovoltaic manufacturers, after meeting with TWC staff wrote: "I greatly admire your work. By pro-actively identifying the right lands for development, you will accelerate our needed push toward solar, and short-circuit potentially years of wasted time, effort and good will between the solar and environmental communities. Your work is a model for other states and countries, and has historic dimension."

Myers summarizes The Wildlands Conservancy's inventory: "Landscape preservation and solar development debate has been mischaracterized as green versus green. Now we have reduced that conflict to the broad-based environmental support for placing projects on disturbed lands versus the lack of support for placing projects on pristine public lands, especially those donated for permanent preservation." Thirteen mainstream environmental groups developed "Renewable Energy Siting Criteria" that support placing projects on disturbed lands (copy enclosed).

TWC uses solar on previously disturbed lands on its desert and central valley preserves and has broadly supported properly sited solar and wind projects. TWC became involved in renewable energy public policy to prevent lands it donated to the Department of the Interior for conservation from becoming industrialized. "It would be a tragedy if the 100-year American tradition of land gift philanthropy that has made Acadia, Grand Tetons and Redwoods National Parks what they are today, died in the desert sands" said Myers.

TWC believes more focus should be kept on distributed generation of roof top photovoltaic energy. A 2005 study commissioned by the California Energy Commission titled "**California Rooftop Photovoltaic (PV) Resource Assessment and Growth Potential by County**" showed that commercial and residential rooftops had the technical potential to generate 67,889 megawatts of electricity. Currently, California peaks around 65,000 megawatts on the hottest of summer days.