

## I.0 INTRODUCTION

### I.0.1 Document Organization

The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP or Plan) is a comprehensive plan that provides for renewable energy and transmission development projects and for the conservation of sensitive species and ecosystems in California's Mojave and Colorado/Sonoran deserts. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Energy Commission (CEC), and California Department of Fish and Wildlife (CDFW) must determine whether to approve proposed components of the DRECP. The Renewable Energy Action Team (REAT), composed of members from these agencies, collaborated to develop the DRECP and focus on renewable energy and natural resource conservation in the desert region. The DRECP is described in more detail in Section I.0.3.

This document, the Draft DRECP and Environmental Impact Report/Environmental Impact Statement (EIR/EIS), addresses how federal and state governmental agencies with jurisdiction over renewable energy and transmission development projects in California's desert regions propose to (1) manage public lands for species and habitat values under the Federal Land Policy and Management Act (FLPMA) and protect species from take and species' critical habitat from adverse modification under the federal Endangered Species Act (ESA), and (2) conserve natural communities and species pursuant to the ESA and the California Natural Community Conservation Planning Act (NCCPA).

The REAT set forth these primary goals for the DRECP:

- To contribute to the conservation (recovery) of Covered Species (see Section I.3.4, DRECP Biological Conservation Planning Process), habitats, and natural communities, as well as to the physical, visual, cultural, and social resources in the Plan Area (see Figure I.0-1)
- To streamline future permitting efforts for the development of renewable energy in the Plan Area to help meet California's Renewables Portfolio Standard (RPS), California's greenhouse gas emission reduction targets, and other state and federal renewable energy and transmission goals

The renewable energy and transmission development and the conservation actions, which comprise the Covered Activities, are detailed in Volume II, Description of Alternatives.

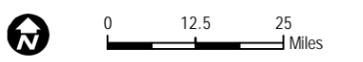
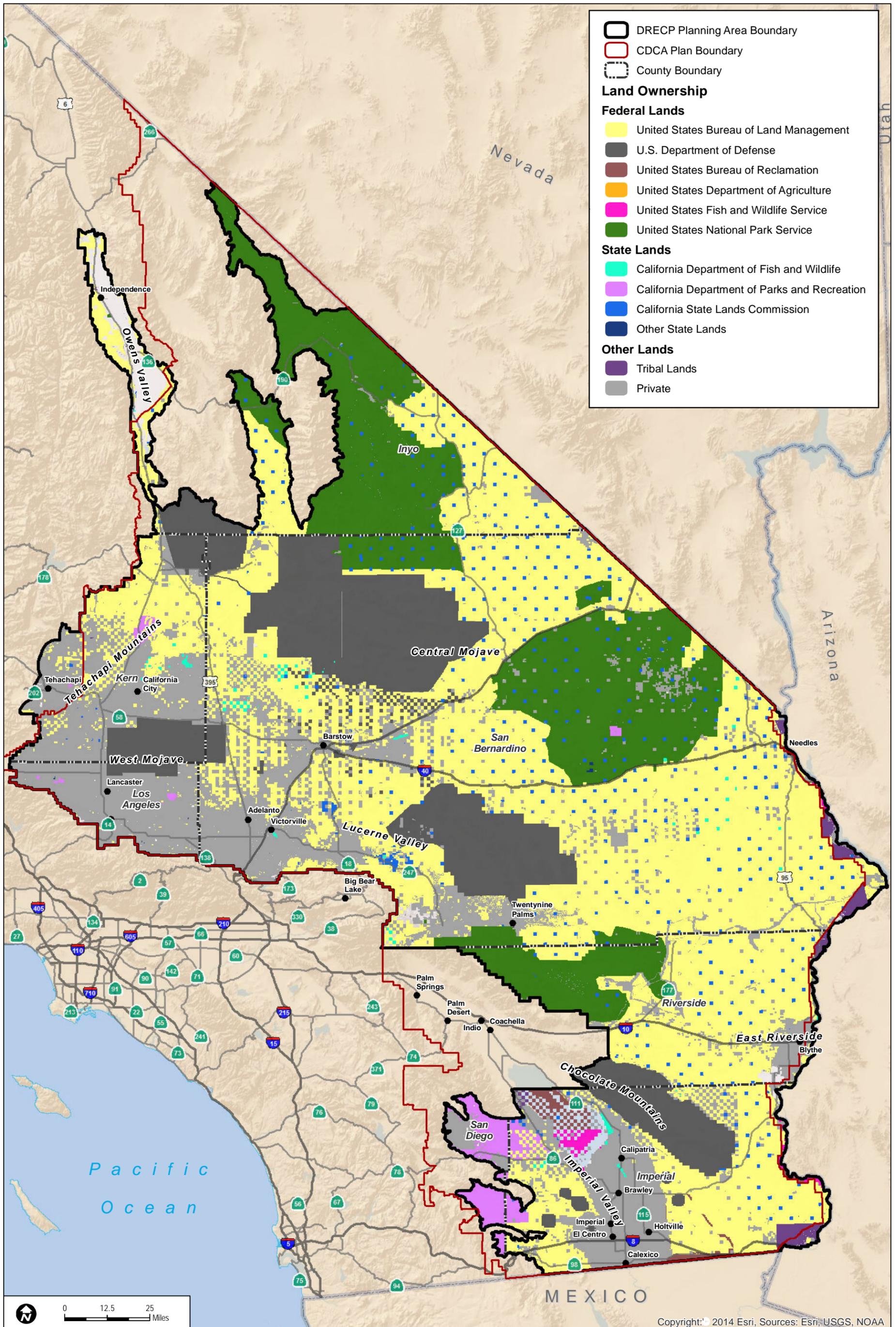
The DRECP and EIR/EIS is a combined programmatic document that includes all required elements of the proposed BLM Land Use Plan Amendment (LUPA), a proposed Natural Community Conservation Plan (NCCP), and a proposed General Conservation Plan (GCP), as well as all required analyses under the California Environmental Quality Act (CEQA) and

National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA). For complete descriptions of the LUPA, NCCP, and GCP components under each alternative, see Volume II.

The USFWS and BLM are the federal co-lead agencies for preparation of the EIS element of the DRECP and EIR/EIS. The USFWS will consider approval of the GCP, and BLM will consider approval of the LUPA.

CDFW will consider approval of the NCCP. CEC is the state lead agency for preparation of the EIR. The California State Lands Commission (CSLC), because of its land ownership and management responsibilities of state lands in the Plan Area, intends to be an applicant under the GCP and a plan participant under the NCCP. The CSLC and BLM, through a May 2012 Memorandum of Agreement, also established a land-exchange process to consolidate the respective agencies' land ownership in the Plan Area.

In addition, a DRECP Stakeholder Committee, whose members were appointed by the DRECP Director, was established to inform the REAT agencies on the development of the DRECP and EIR/EIS and to provide a forum for public participation and input. The Stakeholder Committee was composed of individuals from local governments, environmental organizations, electric utilities, renewable energy industry associations, renewable energy project developers, a coalition of Native American tribes, and off-highway vehicle associations. Federal and state agencies also participated in 22 Stakeholder Committee meetings from March 2009 to July 2012. See Appendix A for a complete list of the Stakeholder Committee members and Volume V for more information on consultation and public involvement.



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Sources: ESRI (2014); CEC (2013); BLM (2013); CDFW (2013); USFWS (2013)

**FIGURE I.0-1**  
**DRECP Plan Area**

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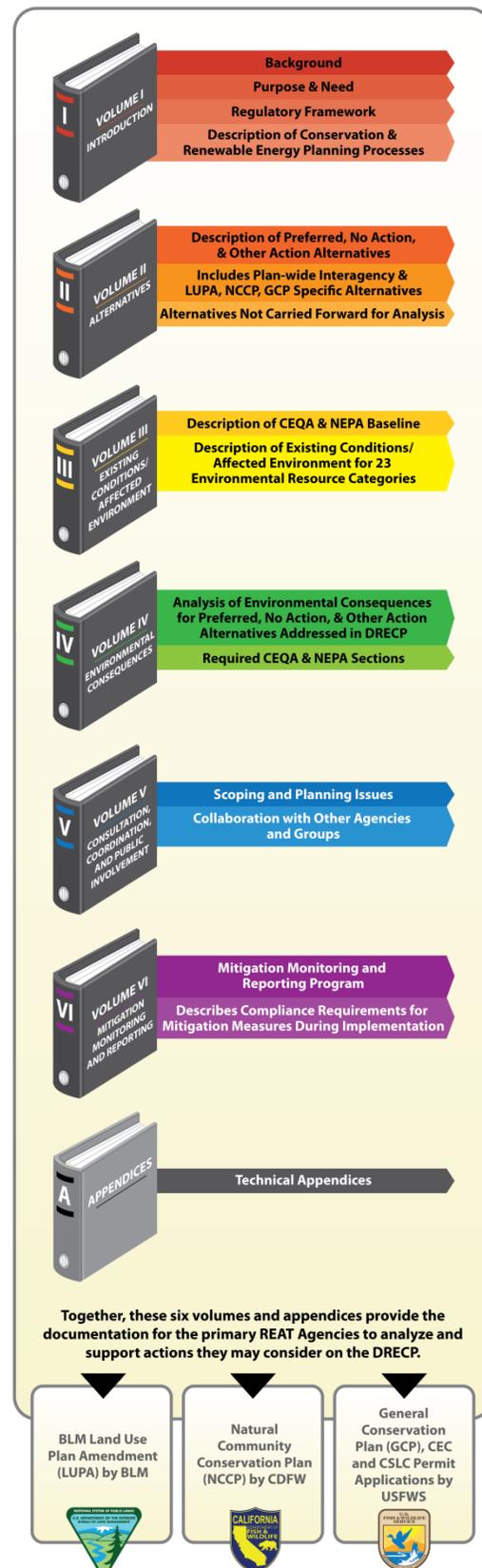
The EIR/EIS elements of this combined programmatic document evaluate the potential environmental, cultural, social, and scenic effects of the agencies' Preferred Alternative<sup>1</sup> and other alternatives in accordance with CEQA (California Public Resources Code, Section 21000 et seq.). This document follows the CEQA Guidelines (14 California Code of Regulations [CCR] 15000 et seq.), NEPA (42 United States Code [U.S.C.] 4321 et seq.), the Council on Environmental Quality's (CEQ's) regulations for implementing NEPA (40 Code of Federal Regulations [CFR] 1500 et seq.), the Department of the Interior's regulations for implementing NEPA (43 CFR Part 46), and guidelines from other applicable federal and state authorities.

The DRECP and EIR/EIS comprises six volumes (plus appendices) that address the multiple actions to be taken by the agencies to describe the proposed project, analyze the potential impacts, and implement the DRECP, including public involvement and CEQA mitigation reporting and monitoring.

The DRECP and EIR/EIS document is organized in the following manner.

Volume I, Background and Planning Process, includes:

- Introduction
- Objectives and purpose and need
- Regulatory framework
- Descriptions of conservation, renewable energy, and transmission planning processes



<sup>1</sup> The Preferred Alternative constitutes the proposed project as defined under CEQA.

Volume II, Description of Alternatives, includes:

- Descriptions of the Preferred Alternative, No Action Alternative, and Alternatives 1 through 4
- For each alternative, a description of the combined elements for all REAT agencies across the entire Plan Area (referred to as the interagency or Plan-wide description of the alternative) along with a description of agency-specific elements of the alternative including the LUPA, NCCP, and GCP
- Descriptions of other alternatives considered and descriptions of alternatives not carried forward for further analysis

Volume III, Environmental Setting/Affected Environment, includes:

- Descriptions of CEQA and NEPA baselines
- Descriptions of existing conditions and affected environment for 23 environmental, cultural, social, and scenic resource categories addressed in the DRECP and EIR/EIS

Volume IV, Environmental Consequences/Effects Analysis, includes:

- Analysis of environmental consequences for 23 environmental, cultural, social, and scenic resource categories—for each alternative—addressed in detail in the DRECP and EIR/EIS
- Analysis of cumulative effects
- Required CEQA and NEPA sections

Volume V, Consultation, Coordination, and Public Participation, includes:

- Description of public scoping process and summary of issues raised in scoping
- Stakeholder involvement process
- Explanation of interaction with other agencies
- Summary of government-to-government consultations with Native American tribes

Volume VI, Mitigation Monitoring and Reporting Plan, includes:

- Description of the CEQA mitigation monitoring requirements, including coordination with federal lead agencies

Appendices include:

- Technical reports and documentation
- Implementation agreement(s)

- Cost and funding analysis
- Supporting documentation for LUPA-, NCCP-, and GCP-specific elements of the DRECP
- The reserve design process, approach to compensation, and more

These six volumes and appendices analyze, disclose, and provide the necessary documentation for the REAT agencies to analyze and support certain proposed DRECP actions they may consider as part of the DRECP and EIR/EIS. These actions include:

- LUPA by BLM
- NCCP by CDFW, including execution of an implementation agreement and issuance of a Section 2835 permit to CSLC
- GCP by USFWS (i.e., programmatic Habitat Conservation Plan), including CEC and CSLC applications under the GCP

The DRECP and EIR/EIS provides a comprehensive Plan-wide analysis of each alternative, as well as separate analyses of the potential agency actions noted above. Figures I.0-2, I.0-3, and I.0-4 identify the plan areas addressed for each of these actions.

## **I.0.2 Requirement for Further Analysis**

The EIR/EIS elements of this combined CEQA and NEPA document provide a programmatic-level analysis of impacts on the human environment such as biological resources (including but not limited to impacts on special-status species), cultural, social, scenic, and other environmental resources. Renewable energy and transmission projects covered by the DRECP and EIR/EIS will require project-level environmental review of site-specific impacts on resources as a necessary part of the subsequent approval process. The REAT agencies anticipate that subsequent site-specific environmental analysis for these projects would tier from the DRECP and EIR/EIS.

Tiering is the process of using the analysis of general matters in broader CEQA or NEPA analyses, such as the DRECP and EIR/EIS, in the development of a subsequent, narrower CEQA or NEPA document. The subsequent analysis will incorporate by reference the programmatic environmental analysis from the broader CEQA or NEPA document and concentrate solely on the site-specific issues identified for the subsequent project that have not been analyzed in the programmatic CEQA or NEPA document (e.g., 40 CFR 1508.28; 43 CFR 46.140; California Public Resources Code, Section 21093–21094; and 14 CCR 15152 and 15169).

## **I.0.3 Project Background and Overview**

The DRECP and EIR/EIS were developed to (1) advance federal and state natural resource conservation goals and other federal land management goals; (2) meet the requirements of

the ESA, California Environmental Endangered Species Act (CESA), NCCPA, and FLPMA in the Mojave and Colorado/Sonoran desert regions of Southern California; and (3) facilitate the timely and streamlined permitting of renewable energy projects. Appendix A provides a chronological summary of federal and state agreements and actions taken to initiate development of the DRECP and EIR/EIS.

The DRECP includes a strategy that identifies and maps areas for renewable energy development and areas for long-term natural resource conservation. The following describes how the DRECP combines a LUPA, NCCP, GCP, and EIR/EIS.

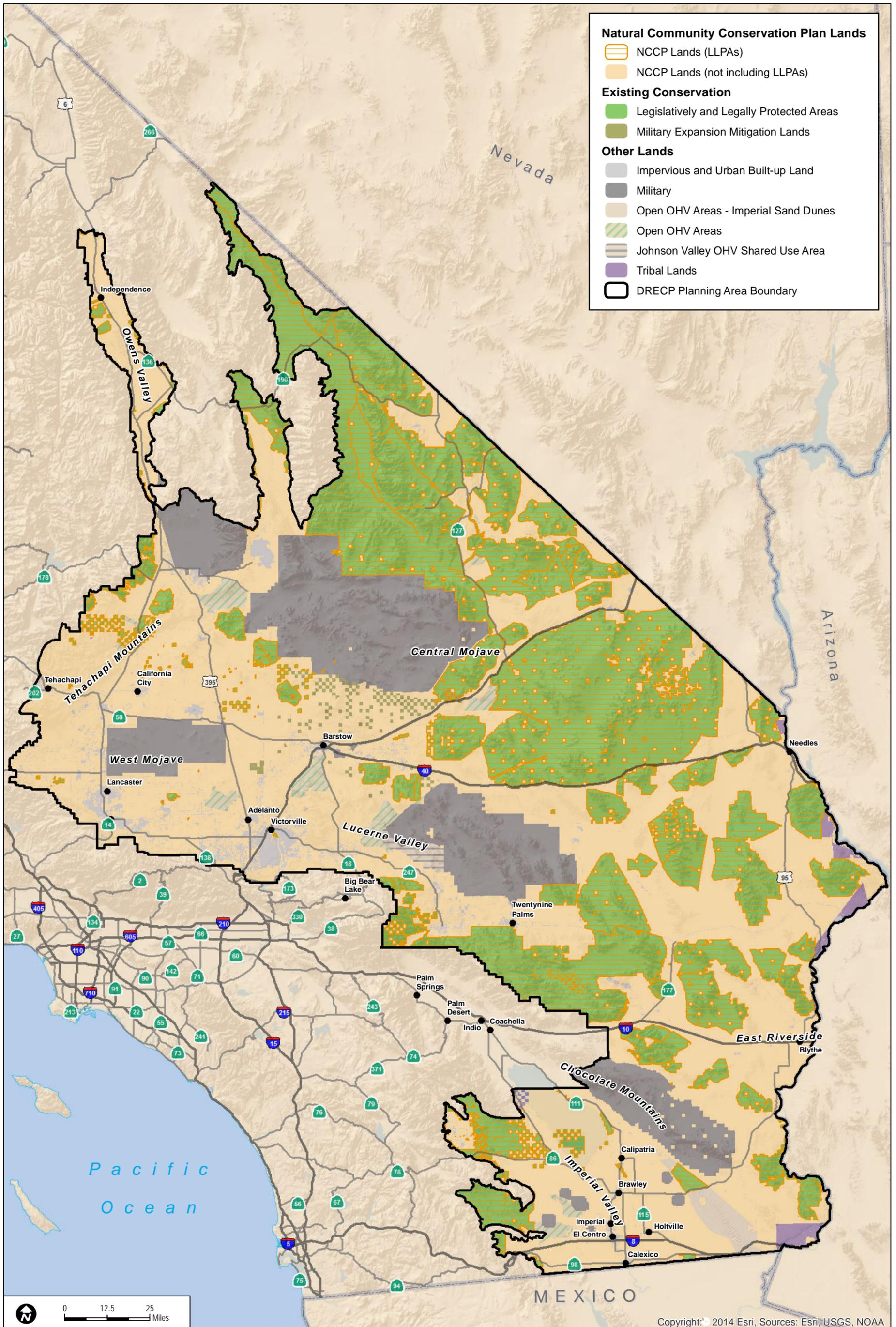
Pursuant to 43 CFR 1610.5-5, the DRECP is intended to serve as a BLM LUPA, which would amend the California Desert Conservation Area (CDCA) Plan as well as the Bishop and Bakersfield Resource Management Plans (RMPs), specifically related to natural resource conservation and renewable energy development. In addition, on BLM-administered land, the BLM will use the DRECP and EIR/EIS as a programmatic-level planning document to support supplemental area-specific and site-specific project analysis, including ESA Section 7 consultation (see Section I.1.2.2, USFWS Decisions to Be Made).

With regard to the ESA and NCCPA, the DRECP is structured to serve as a programmatic GCP and NCCP, respectively, as described in Section I.0.3.1.2. Commensurate with the DRECP conservation strategy, the USFWS and CDFW may also provide federal and state take authorizations and regulatory assurances, under the ESA and NCCPA respectively, to facilitate the development of renewable energy resources in the Plan Area.

The CEC intends to use the DRECP in its review of desert-area projects under the Warren-Alquist Act. The CEC will apply to the USFWS for a federal incidental take permit under the GCP for CEC-approved projects that are located on private land and approved under the DRECP (see Appendix M for the CEC's GCP Permit Application). In addition, if CDFW approves the DRECP as an NCCP, CEC will be able to provide state incidental take authorization for CEC-approved projects that are on private and federal land that are covered by the DRECP.



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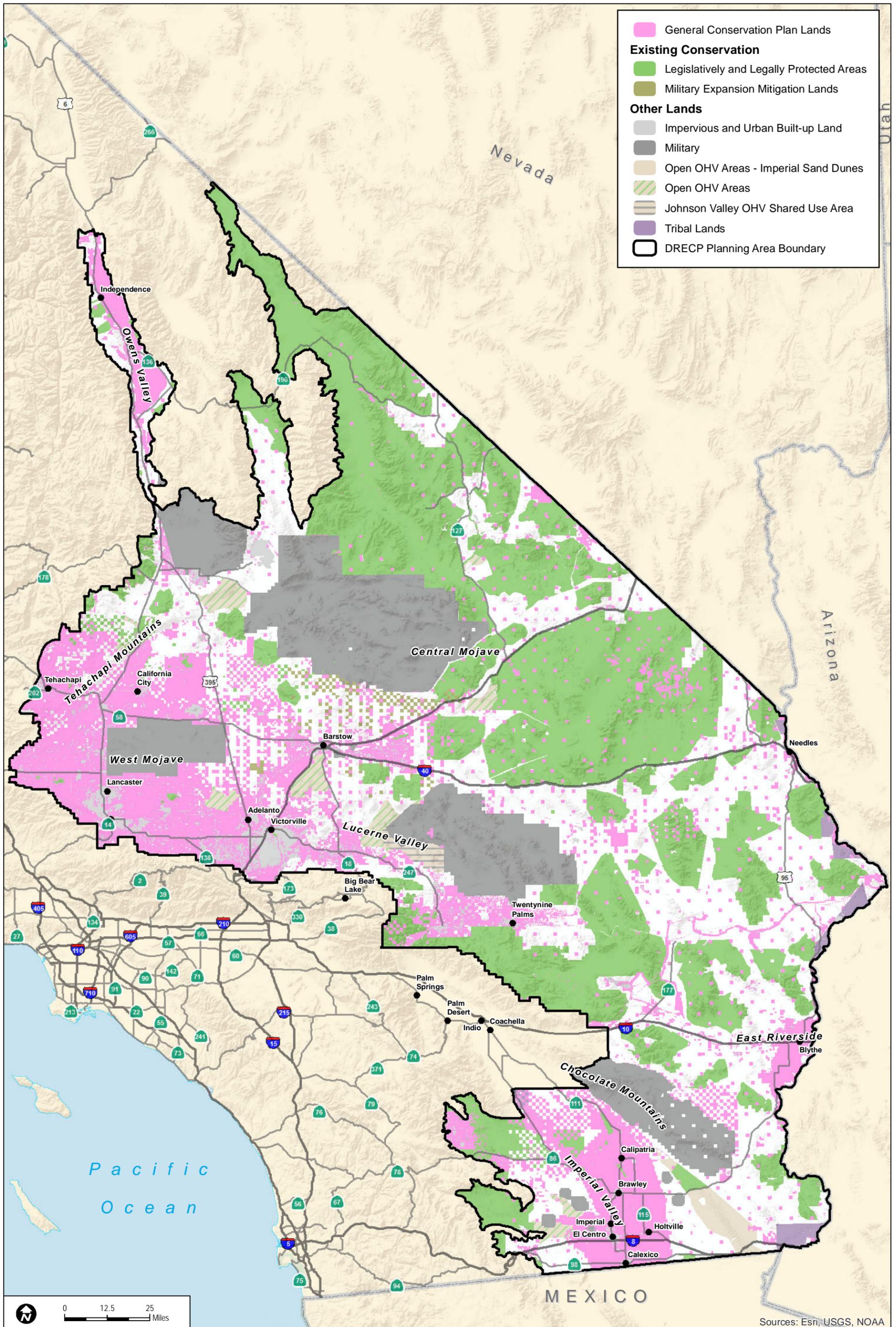


Sources: ESRI (2014); CEC (2013); BLM (2013); CDFW (2013); USFWS (2013)

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**FIGURE I.O-3**  
**Natural Community Conservation Plan Lands**

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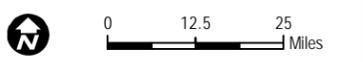
**General Conservation Plan Lands**

**Existing Conservation**

- Legislatively and Legally Protected Areas
- Military Expansion Mitigation Lands

**Other Lands**

- Impervious and Urban Built-up Land
- Military
- Open OHV Areas - Imperial Sand Dunes
- Open OHV Areas
- Johnson Valley OHV Shared Use Area
- Tribal Lands
- DRECP Planning Area Boundary



Sources: ESRI (2014); CEC (2013); BLM (2013); CDFW (2013); USFWS (2013)

Sources: Esri, USGS, NOAA

**FIGURE I.0-4**  
**General Conservation Plan Lands**

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The USFWS will consider issuance of Section 10(a)(1)(B) permits to individual applicants, local jurisdictions, or state agencies that apply for incidental take authorization for renewable energy projects on nonfederal lands that are consistent with the USFWS proposed GCP. CEC and CSLC are applying under the GCP for the incidental take of Covered Species associated with project proposals under their respective jurisdiction or land ownership on nonfederal lands in the Plan Area. In addition, the USFWS is considering the issuance of take permits for golden eagles (*Aquila chrysaetos*) under the regulatory provisions of the Bald and Golden Eagle Protection Act in conjunction with renewable energy development on both federal and nonfederal lands within the Plan Area. As part of its approval of the DRECP, the USFWS may issue permits for the incidental take of Covered Species that are federally listed endangered, threatened, and special-status animal species (Covered Species) on nonfederal land.

Similarly, upon approval and adoption of the DRECP as an NCCP, CDFW may issue to the CSLC and state or local agencies one or more authorizations for the incidental take of Covered Species. In addition, CDFW, CEC, and any agency holding an NCCP take permit from CDFW may authorize incidental take by private developers under state law for projects carried out under the DRECP.

The National Park Service, Environmental Protection Agency, Department of Defense, California Public Utilities Commission, California State Parks, and California Independent System Operator are assisting in the preparation of the DRECP, but none of these agencies is an applicant for state or federal take authorizations at this time. Likewise, the City of Lancaster and all seven counties listed below with jurisdiction over land within the Plan Area have provided—as members of the DRECP Stakeholder Committee—comments during the development of the DRECP; however, to date, none has become an applicant for federal or state take authorizations.

### **I.0.3.1 Plan Area**

The Plan Area (see Figure I.0-1) encompasses the Mojave Desert and Colorado/Sonoran Desert ecoregion subareas in California. The Plan Area includes all or a portion of the following counties: Imperial, Inyo, Kern, Los Angeles, Riverside, San Bernardino, and San Diego. The Plan Area covers approximately 22,585,000 acres.

The northern boundary of the Plan Area follows the lower elevations of the Owens Valley, Amargosa Valley, and Death Valley in Inyo County. The eastern Plan Area boundary follows the state border from the Funeral Mountains in Inyo County to the U.S.–Mexico border. The southern Plan Area boundary follows the U.S.–Mexico border to southwestern Imperial County. The southwestern Plan Area boundary follows the lower elevations of western Imperial and eastern San Diego counties to include the Colorado/Sonoran Desert portions of these counties. In Riverside County, the western Plan Area boundary follows the eastern

edge of the Coachella Valley Multiple Species Habitat Conservation Plan Area. This approved plan was not included in the Plan Area because it already covers construction of renewable energy projects, and the DRECP would be largely redundant.

In San Bernardino and Los Angeles counties, the Plan Area boundary follows the northern edge of lands managed by the U.S. Forest Service (USFS), including the San Bernardino, Angeles, and Los Padres national forests. National Forest lands approximate the ecoregion subarea boundary between the Mojave and South Coast ecoregion subareas, whose natural communities and species are very different from the desert ecoregion subarea of the Plan Area. Because USFS lands are a nondesert ecoregion subarea, USFS lands are not included in the Plan Area. In areas where the USFS ownership boundary is discontinuous and where this boundary abuts the BLM CDCA Plan boundary, the CDCA Plan boundary is used.

In the Tehachapi Mountains and southern Sierra Nevada Range of eastern Kern County, the Plan Area does not include land under Tejon Ranch ownership in the Tehachapi area because renewable energy development is explicitly prohibited on most of these lands, in accordance with the Tejon Ranch Conservation and Land Use Agreement (June 2008), and the terms of conservation easements held by the State of California on 62,000 acres of Tejon Ranch. In addition, small areas of land managed by the USFS in Kern and Inyo counties were not included in the Plan Area because USFS is not a participating agency in the DRECP.

#### ***1.0.3.1.1 BLM Land Use Plan Amendment***

The BLM LUPA lands, depicted in Figure I.0-2, would apply within the Plan Area to BLM lands covered by the CDCA Plan as well as the Bakersfield and Bishop RMPs. The LUPA would also identify lands for inclusion in National Landscape Conservation System in those portions of the CDCA outside the Plan Area, in accordance with the Omnibus Public Lands Management Act, and establish Visual Resource Management classes and land use allocations outside the Plan Area but within the CDCA. The BLM LUPA would not include the Colorado River Corridor, which is under the management of the BLM–Arizona State Office.

#### ***1.0.3.1.2 DRECP Permit Areas***

The Plan Area encompasses different permit areas for the NCCP and GCP.

#### **Natural Community Conservation Plan Area**

The proposed NCCP Area covers the entire Plan Area, with the exception of Other Lands<sup>2</sup> (see Figure I.0-3), and does include BLM lands within the Plan Area.

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<sup>2</sup> Other Lands include military lands, tribal lands, and BLM Open OHV areas within the overall boundaries of the Plan Area.

## **General Conservation Plan Permit Area**

The proposed GCP Permit Area includes all nonfederal lands within the DRECP Development Focus Areas and Conservation Planning Areas in the entire Plan Area (see Figure I.0-4 ), as well as nonfederal inholdings within Existing Conservation Lands and BLM-administered lands. Within the GCP Permit Area, Covered Species would be incidentally taken in conjunction with Covered Activities. The larger GCP Plan Area encompasses the GCP Permit Area as well as Priority Conservation Areas outside the GCP Permit Area where permittee non-acquisition mitigation measures may be implemented (i.e., BLM-administered lands corresponding to the Interagency Plan-Wide Conservation Priority Areas shown on Figure II.3-2 and the DRECP NCCP Reserve Design, as shown in Figure II.3-7). The USFWS proposed GCP, as well as CEC and CSLC application materials for incidental take permits under the GCP, are included in Appendix M. The proposed CEC Permit Area consists of nonfederal lands where CEC would have project licensing authority, which in some cases may include CSLC lands, but it does not have a specific spatial boundary. The proposed CSLC Permit Area consists of CSLC school lands and sovereign lands.

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