

# **Streamline Environmental Permitting for Green Certified Sites**

## **Fresno County, California: One Voice Policy Request**

Fresno County requests the creation of federal policy to assist in streamlining the environmental permitting process in order to create a series of green certified sites. These sites would be nationally pre-permitted for the attraction of clean energy and water technology projects.

## **Fresno County in the Heart of the San Joaquin Valley**

Fresno County is situated in the heart of California's San Joaquin Valley and has the largest population of any of the eight counties in the region. Unfortunately, the San Joaquin Valley is one of the poorest regions in the United States. A 2004 study commissioned by the Congressional Research Office showed that the region received less economic support per capita basis than any other area in the nation. The findings of this study were confirmed in 2007, and since then, economic conditions have worsened. The San Joaquin Valley has the highest unemployment, the highest foreclosure rates, and the worst concentrated poverty in the country. In addition to these challenges, the San Joaquin Valley is the only area in the United States with air quality so poor that all new development must pay indirect source permitting fees to the regional Air Pollution District. Despite the current economic environment, there are great opportunities for clean energy and water technologies in Fresno County and the San Joaquin Valley.

## **Opportunities in Clean Energy and Water Technology Development**

With abundant sunshine and a lengthy growing season, the region has long been recognized as the global leader in agriculture production. However, Fresno County has many other assets that are ideal for clean energy and water technology development, including, but not limited to, abundant flat land, vital transportation corridors, a major metropolitan area (connected to 13 rural cities), clean and tainted water sources, and intersecting transmission lines. In addition to these assets, the State of California continues to show political support for green development. For example, the State of California Legislature and Governor passed several laws that require publicly owned utility power companies to purchase a portion of their power portfolio from renewable sources (i.e. wind, water, and/or sun). The most current legislation requires power companies to purchase 33% of their power from renewable sources in the year 2020. Today, companies purchase about 11% of their power from clean sources, and the difference between the 2010 and the 2020 figures represents a tremendous opportunity for Fresno County.

Combining Fresno County's assets with State of California political support makes Fresno County exceptionally attractive for clean energy and water technology development, including wind, solar, geothermal, hydropower, nuclear, energy storage, smart grids, biomass, biogas, and biofuels. Economically and environmentally, these industries will develop a more affordable, diverse, and sustainable electricity mix that will positively impact key quality of life issues such as poverty and unemployment, air quality, strategic land use, water availability, energy independence, and agriculture production. However, many projects are continually weighed down or terminated because of inconsistent environmental policies that inflate costs and increase timelines. This unfriendly business climate intimidates potential investors and paralyzes growth.

## **Challenges with the Current Federal Policy**

There are two major issues that inhibit green projects in Fresno County and the San Joaquin Valley: 1) Inconsistencies with processes, and 2) Compliance with the Endangered Species Act (ESA). Most, if not all green projects, will be developed in the unincorporated areas and not in an urban region. Therefore, projects will require an entitlement application to be processed through the local government (i.e. the County of Fresno) for approval. Projects will also have to comply with other local, regional, and state laws as applicable. Many of these laws have their origin in the federal ESA.

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If the land proposed for clean energy and water technology projects is within an area of known endangered or threatened species habitat, then a new set of compliance issues emerge. The time periods associated with the consultation processes are inconsistent and lengthy. Since there are no application review time limits for agencies, the differences between a Section 10, Section 7, or safe harbor alternative can add years to the processing of a project. Also, there are several lists of species that must be protected, some by the State of California and some by the federal government. A second list can add further inconsistencies and length to the process. In order to reaffirm the Nation's clean energy and water technology priorities at the state and local levels, Fresno County proposes a series of possible solutions to streamline the environmental permitting process.

## Federal Policy Talking Points: Possible Solutions

In order to streamline the environmental permitting process for clean energy and water technology projects at the federal level, there are several possibilities to consider, including:

1. Prioritize clean energy and water technology projects at the top of review lists for all federal agencies, including the Department of Energy, United States (U.S.) Fish & Wildlife Service, Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Department of Agriculture, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency, U.S. Housing & Urban Development, and U.S. Department of Commerce.
2. Shorten U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service review times to 90 days (with an extenuating circumstance clause) in order to make all types of consultation processes consistent
3. Implement the same permitting processes for private projects as federal or other governmental agency projects
4. Consider non-standard options to mitigate the potential impact of endangered species habitat. For example, consider long-term monitoring versus standard ratios
5. Revise protocol surveys to fit the specific landscape, not the standard project
6. Work within timeframes requested by local, regional, and state agencies
7. Shorten biological and botanical study timeframes or duration, accepting the most current scientific information of the specified time period
8. Create a series of demonstration project areas, determined by specific eligibility criteria, where streamlined federal policies would be implemented and tested

## Feedback from Federal Agencies

### For More Information Contact:

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# Benefits of Streamlining the Environmental Permitting Process for Green Certified Sites



- lessen dependency on Foreign oil

- create jobs, reduce poverty

- attract foreign investment



- Increase production of clean renewable energy and water resources

- improve Air Quality