

**Testimony of Commissioner Julia Levin
Before the House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources
May 11, 2009**

Good Morning, Mr. Chairman and Committee Members. My name is Julia Levin and I am the presiding Commissioner for Renewable Energy at the California Energy Commission. Thank you for the opportunity to provide this testimony.

The California Energy Commission is responsible for implementing statewide policies on renewable energy, energy efficiency, electricity transmission, transportation fuels and the State's climate change policies. The Energy Commission is also the state permitting agency for thermal power plants greater than 50 megawatts (MW), including solar thermal, geothermal and natural gas powered plants. In addition, the Energy Commission permits transmission lines associated with thermal power plants, develops a statewide Strategic Transmission Investment Plan and designates transmission corridors on non-federal lands.

As you know, California has a long history of leadership on climate and clean energy issues. In 2002, California enacted the country's largest Renewable Portfolio Standard, requiring 20 percent of the State's electricity to be from renewable sources. In 2006, California enacted the Global Warming Solutions Act, also known as "AB 32," which requires California to reduce its global warming emissions to 1990 levels by 2020, a cut of about 29% from business-as-usual levels. Last fall, Governor Schwarzenegger issued Executive Order S-14-08 raising California's Renewable Portfolio Standard to 33 percent by 2020 and calling on the State to reduce its global warming emissions 80 percent below 1990 levels by 2050.

Achieving these goals is critical to protect California from the worst impacts of climate change – rising sea level, air pollution, droughts, forest fires, declining fish and wildlife populations, and significant adverse impacts on agriculture. California's climate and clean energy policies also strengthen our economy by creating new jobs and business opportunities, saving consumers money, and providing energy security. The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act recognizes the economic benefits of moving toward a clean energy economy by investing more than forty billion dollars into clean energy programs. We hope to take advantage of those dollars by expediting the permitting of appropriately sited renewable energy projects in California.

These are ambitious goals that require state and federal agencies to work together to accelerate renewable energy development while protecting and conserving sensitive resources. California began a more coordinated planning effort called the Renewable Energy Transmission Initiative – known as "RETI" - to bring agencies and stakeholders together to identify the most cost-effective and environmentally preferable renewable energy zones and transmission corridors. Federal, state and local agencies, renewable energy companies and associations, conservation groups, utilities, the Armed Services and other stakeholders have participated in RETI. RETI will identify and rank Competitive Renewable Energy Zones (CREZ's), develop transmission plans to access those zones, and lead to applications for new

transmission. We believe that RETI will facilitate the siting and permitting of renewable energy projects and the transmission needed to serve those projects.

Last fall, Governor Schwarzenegger issued Executive Order S-14-08 (Attachment A) to increase California's RPS to 33 percent by 2020 and to build on RETI to expedite renewable energy development. At the same time, state and federal agencies – including the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS), California Department of Fish and Game (CDFG), and California Energy Commission (CEC) – entered into a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) that establishes a Renewable Energy Action Team charged with the following tasks:

- Identify Renewable Energy Zones based on energy, economic and environmental factors – this would build on RETI and other scientific and stakeholder input;
- Develop a Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan (DRECP) that identifies priority areas for renewable energy development and conservation;
- Prioritize and expedite review and permitting of renewable energy projects, especially projects within designated Renewable Energy Zones.

State and federal agencies, including BLM, USFWS, the Armed Services, CDFG and CEC, are working together very closely now to coordinate project siting and permitting, transmission planning and conservation in the California Desert. We are very grateful to the federal agencies for their full partnership in these important planning efforts and believe that our partnership is critical to success.

The CEC and CDFG will work together with local and federal agencies as well as stakeholders and scientific experts to produce a guide to Best Management Practices for siting and development of renewable energy, which will be tailored to each energy type – solar, wind, geothermal, biomass. We will also produce a map that identifies appropriate development areas and areas critical to protect from development. These will then form the basis for a long-term conservation plan, known as a Natural Communities Conservation Plan, or NCCP.

We believe that working together with state, federal and local agencies, as well as a wide range of stakeholders in these science-based, transparent planning processes will identify the best areas for renewable energy development, and will expedite that development. We also believe that these processes will identify and lead to the protection of the areas most critical to conserve.