

Bill aims to speed up renewable energy approval

Elizabeth Varin, Imperial Valley Press, 3-8-11

A bill aimed at spurring clean-energy development and jobs passed the state Assembly floor Monday. Assemblyman V. Manuel Pérez, D-Coachella, introduced the bill that he said streamlines the permitting process for renewable energy within the state's Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan. It expands the current program in place for large-scale solar projects by adding wind and geothermal energy projects.

The changes would include offering project developers the option of paying mitigation fees in-lieu of the traditional permitting process, according to a press release from Pérez's office.

The in-lieu fees are then used by the state Department of Fish and Game to acquire and restore habitat lands for species impacted by the projects.

By expediting the approval process, renewable energy projects can be approved on a faster timeline while still upholding the protection of California's ecosystems and wildlife, according to the press release.

The legislation also calls for the preparation of regional conservation plans for the San Joaquin Valley, as well as helping local planning departments engage in planning to facilitate renewable energy development in their jurisdictions, according to the press release.

"If we are serious about creating jobs, we must help promote clean-tech and renewable energy development in our state," Pérez said in a statement. "Smart policy choices can help us aggressively pursue the clean-energy economy and create opportunities that benefit business, workers, communities and the environment."

The bill will head to the Senate Rules Committee, where it will be assigned to a policy committee, according to the press release.