

# Valley Voice: Eagle Mountain power project is folly

**Nate Otto, Special to The Desert Sun, 3-25-16**

I grew up hiking, camping and riding my motorcycle in the California desert's remote canyons at a time when obtaining a significant amount of our energy from wind, sun and geothermal was just a dream.

I now operate a local company that installs rooftop solar, but also takes into consideration the needs of the community and the natural environment. That's why I'm opposed to the Eagle Crest Pumped Storage Project (ECPSP), which bills itself as a renewable energy project, but in reality is a net energy loss, squanders precious water resources and jeopardizes Joshua Tree National Park.

The proposed ECPSP would utilize two of Kaiser's abandoned mine pits, pumping water uphill during non-peak energy hours and letting that water run downhill during peak hours to produce electricity. The project would store energy from utility scale solar installations, functioning as a giant battery.

Eagle Crest Co. wants to pump copious amounts of groundwater to fill the abandoned mining pits from a groundwater basin that is hydraulically connected to the aquifer beneath Joshua Tree National Park. The annual evaporative water loss from the project alone is 1,500 acre feet per year (1 acre foot is 325,000 gallons!).

Using precious desert water for this project wastes a valuable commodity, isn't in the public's interest and threatens one of our national treasures during the worst drought in California history.

Unlike rooftop solar, the technologies associated with the ECPSP are being installed on a massive scale, without truly understanding how they impact the natural environment. From a renewable energy entrepreneur's perspective, this approach doesn't make sense. My company utilizes new technology, but we implement it gradually so we can ensure it works and doesn't have an adverse impact on the environment. In strong contrast, the ECPSP is a huge crap shoot. The public and national park lovers are being asked to place a bet at the roulette wheel for untested technology that could have devastating impacts.

Finally, the two water-filled abandoned mine pits would inflate the population of ravens in the area that prey on desert tortoise. Ravens attracted by these two reservoirs, would fly into Joshua Tree National Park and consume juvenile tortoises in a sizable portion of the park's tortoise habitat.

Although the ECPSP has received a license from the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), the transmission line that would connect it with power lines on Interstate 10 is still being evaluated by the Bureau of Land management. Unfortunately, the BLM is relying on stale, inaccurate and insufficient data in the original project environmental impact study, which has already been criticized by the Department of Interior.

The drive to cash in on federal tax credits and large incentives for energy storage is what is driving this for-profit endeavor at our expense. The city of Palm Springs and the entire state of California needs to move towards a sustainable future. The best outcome would be to stop this project, but for now the BLM should conduct a full EIS on the transmission line to reveal the project's true impact on our federal lands.

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