

Inyo Supervisors Discuss DRECP, Medical Marijuana

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By Deb Murphy

The Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan showed up at Tuesday's Inyo County Board of Supervisors' meeting in a big box. Scaled down from the 8,000-page draft, the final Environmental Impact Statement, 2,000-plus pages, whittled down the acreage identified as Development Focus Areas for renewable energy to 388,000 out of the 10 million acres of Bureau of Land Management land within the scope of the report.

But, the County directed Planning Director Josh Hart to come up with a mildly worded protest that, according to Hart and County Administrative Officer Kevin Carunchio, will keep the County in the discussion. There were some small variations from the County's Renewable Energy General Plan Amendment and a vague new land classification – Unallocated Lands. In the draft, the land masses now ID'd as unallocated were just white; now they're white with lines through them, creating a bit of a mystery.

Hart explained that those areas could be considered for development but would require amendments to the EIR. A pie chart illustrating land designations was identified as conservation lands. Chairman Matt Kingsley questions why no socio-economic analysis was done on the conservation category.

While the Town of Mammoth Lakes and Bishop have been scrambling to meet the March 1 deadline to beat state regulations on medical marijuana, the County opted for a wait and see strategy based on information from Paul Smith, senior legislative advocate for Rural County Representatives of California.

According to Hart, Smith advised his constituents there would be "corrective legislation" to the three medical marijuana bills passed in Sacramento in October. The correction, Smith anticipated, would remove that deadline and allow cities and counties to pass their own ordinances that would override state regulations after March 1.

Hart outlined the nuances of Assembly Bills 266, 243 and Senate Bill 643 that define complex structures for regulating and licensing medical marijuana but implementation is still up in the air. By waiting, the county can decide if it wants to impose other restrictions on cultivation, dispensaries and delivery. The conventional wisdom is these regulations will be in place as the framework for recreational use, a when-not-if legalization by ballot initiative.

Jeff Griffiths was the first and only supervisor who was supportive of loosening the County's ban on cultivation and sales. "Let's look at what's actually going on," he said. "I don't want to deny cultivation for those who use marijuana for medical reasons and delivery makes more sense than dispensaries."

Making the point that both activities are going on in the county, Griffiths was for “sustaining the status quo.” Dan Totheroh and Rick Pucci were both glad for the reprieve; Mark Tillemans and Kingsley both wanted an opportunity to gauge the feeling of their constituents.

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