



Williamson Act Compatible Uses – Solar Energy

SUMMARY OF THE ISSUE

Developing alternative energy sources are a key component to meeting the target of reducing greenhouse gas emission in the State of California by 15% by 2020 as required by AB 32. One of the measures proposed in the AB 32 scoping plan is the Renewables Portfolio Standards Program which aims to increase the amount of electricity generated from renewable energy resources to 20 percent of total retail sales of electricity in California per year by Dec. 31, 2010.

A large percentage of land that contains the characteristics needed for solar development projects is agricultural land. A road block to achieving the goals of AB 32 for Renewables Portfolio Standards Program is that many potential agricultural sites are sites under Williamson Act contract and, as such, must be consistent with the principles outlined in section 51238.1 of the Act. It is difficult to find solar projects consistent with these principles under the current definitions based on the intensive land use of solar projects and the frequent inability for agricultural production to occur on land within the solar project footprint as can occur with wind or oil development projects.

PUBLIC BENEFIT/IMPACT

Development of solar projects provides for an expansion in renewable energy resources, which would reduce our dependence on fossil fuels for energy, provide a cleaner mechanism to produce energy and create more jobs in the clean economy, and help meet the goals of AB 32.

COST TO THE GOVERNMENT

The proposal to allow for solar development projects on agricultural land under Williamson Act contract would provide for a regulatory function for local governments with no real direct cost.

REQUESTED ACTION AND STRATEGY

The County requests its delegation to support legislation to amend the Williamson Act to allow for an avenue for solar development projects to occur on land under Williamson Act contract. This could be pursued through a number of solutions including but not limited to: adding solar development to the definition of agricultural use, considering solar development as a use or conservation of a natural resource (Section 51238.1., providing an exemption in the Williamson Act for solar development, or allowing for solar development to occur as a permitted use based on certain criteria (i.e. only X percent of a property under contract can be considered).

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