

Can We Stop Saying “Green Energy”?

Who are the ad wizards that came up with the term “green energy”?

Reduce, reuse, recycle.....that was so 1990’s.

Now we have “clean”, “green” energy. It comes from “wind farms” and “solar parks” that sound like the kind of places you go for a long weekend

While many of them are indeed located next to desert wilderness, these “parks” and “farms” are not places you want to take the kids.

They are in fact industrial-scale power generating facilities with not much life left.

And this is just the beginning.

Mandated by \$1 trillion dollars of required “green” energy passed by well-meaning but short-sighted voters, we accidentally signed the death warrants for desert and coastal wilderness, the places where sun and wind are abundant.

In fact, right now all over California we are removing actual green plants to install solar panels. Of course, this was never the point of “green energy”.

The following six points illustrate our collective failure to critically evaluate the impacts of industrial-scale solar developments:

#1: Rooftop solar is very different than industrial-scale solar developments. Rooftop solar makes consumer's meters run backwards, saving taxpayers money and the environment too. In contrast, desert solar destroys wilderness, fuels unsustainable sprawl in Arizona and Nevada, and enriches developers, all while costing taxpayers who paid for the subsidies and are often left to clean up the messes (see #6).

#2: Wilderness is not renewable. The tops of many mountain ranges in the Mojave Desert are Federal Wilderness Areas. Although no solar panels or motorized vehicles are allowed, the industrial-scale solar developments in the valley bottoms below are clearly visible. As a result, unlike most wilderness areas, the higher up you hike the vistas become increasingly industrialized. If not a direct violation of the Wilderness Act, it is certainly a violation of the spirit.

#3: Solar developments are lifeless wastelands. Far from parks and farms, these developments are created just like any other industrial development. First, hundreds or thousands of acres of desert are scraped bare of all vegetation and animal life, wrapped in razor wire, and then paved with concrete or gravel to ensure that no endangered species move back in once the site has been "cleared." These are factory farms, if we must use the flawed analogy.

#4: These are not "green" companies. It's natural to think that somehow green energy companies are out to save the environment but many of the same owners and investors are the same players in the traditional energy sector, obscured by a web of holding companies and LLCs. In economics the buzzword is "creating new markets" even if these markets are artificially propped up by taxpayer incentives. What we should be doing is eliminating markets by reducing consumption, and by installing rooftop solar and making consumer's meters run backwards. But no politician ever ran on a platform of "eliminating markets" no matter how good it was for the environment or consumers.

#5: We are sacrificing California's wilderness to fuel the unsustainable growth of Las Vegas and Phoenix. California itself has a power surplus. You can't transport electricity very far, meaning most of the electricity generated in the Mojave Desert goes to cities in the desert outside California, with much of the power wasted in the form of hot wires along the way.

#6: Perhaps the worst is that most of these facilities will rapidly age out due to advances in technology, and many are never cleaned up afterward. They sit there, unused for decades, leaking fluids and defacing vistas. Once the LLCs go bust the cost shifts to local governments and taxpayers to clean up the abandoned industrial facilities.

What is at stake

We need to stop using the misleading terms "green energy" and "clean energy".

Those things do not exist in any normal sense and were created to create new markets.

We should be eliminating markets by reducing consumption, not creating new buzzwords.

Wilderness, by definition, is not renewable.



Figure 1: Photograph of the SEGS Solar Generation Facility adjacent to Harper Lake, one of the last natural wetlands in the eastern Mojave Desert and critical habitat for migratory wildlife. The entire facility is clearly visible from no less than three federal wilderness areas, seen in the background. The higher you go in these wilderness areas, the more industrialized the landscape becomes. The electricity from this facility feeds Los Angeles, Phoenix and Las Vegas.



Figure 2: Breaking new ground on SEGS Generation Facilities VIII-IX. No vegetation remains and the area is fenced off. The electricity from this facility will primarily feed Las Vegas.



Figure 3: Abandoned, aging infrastructure.