

Solar Horror Story

HVCC invited Chuck Bell, Richard Selby and Lorrie Steely to the June meeting at the Johnson Valley Community Center.

All three had helped mobilize widespread support for the appeal against permitting the Bowman Solar project in Landers. HVCC invited them to tell the history of the Lone Valley Solar installation on Camp Rock Road in Lucerne Valley, and the current Solar One 20 MW PV project application to be built on a site directly to the east across the road from it.

Chuck is president of the Lucerne Valley Economic Development Association (LVEDA). Richard is chairman of the Lucerne Valley-Johnson Valley Municipal Advisory Council (MAC) Lorrie is founder of the Mojave Communities Conservation Collaborative (MC3).

Chuck related their experience with the first applicants for the Lone Valley site (formerly two sites, Agincourt and Marathon). This application was in before the County Solar Moratorium or ordinance were in place. Chuck and Richard consulted with the planners, pointed out many problems including terrain, slope and drainage, close neighbors, water usage for dust control.

The site plan was improved, but then the project was sold to another industrial energy developer. The new owner went back to the original defective plan, and in fact deviated from that .

Construction began in spring with non-local union workers, not a boon to the local economy. The timing was terrible, the usual high winds raised huge dust clouds from the scraped surface soil and rocks, far more water was used than projected to attempt to hold down the dust.

Huge cost overruns were caused by striking hidden boulders when installing panel supports, and by citations from Code Enforcement and Air Quality Management District. Traffic and noise distressed the neighbors for months. Blackouts in the hot summertime plagued the entire region as the SCE power lines were upgraded to accommodate the increased load (residents in Johnson Valley were told it was to improve reliability).

The tortoise fencing has now been removed. What is left is acres of solar panels on bare, dust-producing ground, and a fence. Property tax will only be assessed on the fencing, not the solar development (an incentive courtesy of the feds, a loss of revenues to the County and to Lucerne Valley).

Even though three County Supervisors, Ramos, Lovingood and Gonzales, visited the area at various times and agreed the Lone Valley site was inappropriate, Chuck was advised that an appeal would be a waste of money, it was already a done deal.

Richard said all their discussions with County and developers occurred around election time, there was no MAC or Supervisors Field Representative to take the case to, so he presented objections as representative of small water company near the project.

He argued the flash flooding potential of the Lone Valley location. Impeding natural percolation of water from the mountains into the

Cushenbury watershed endangers everything downslope – residents' homes, roads and Hwy 247, as runoff rushes for miles to Lucerne Dry Lake.

All the negative impacts of Lone Valley pointed out to County officials by Chuck, Richard and many others also apply to the Solar One project site. It is subject to the same blowing dust conditions, the same disturbance of residents, the same flash flooding in the Cushenbury watershed.

Lorrie reported what the public had to say at the recent Solar One scoping meeting, all objecting to the project. One unforeseen consequence was brought out: after the complete disruption of habitat by grading Lone Valley Solar, rodents have invaded the houses and properties of nearby residents, followed by snakes.

Both Lorrie and Chuck have forwarded scoping comments by MC3 and LVEDA for distribution to anyone interested. HVCC had agreed to send a letter to Land Use Services, endorsing LVEDA points.

All the objections raised against Lone Valley can be aimed against Solar One when their Draft Environmental reports are published (these were not required of Agincourt or Marathon, now Lone Valley). Rarely will we have such an Awful Warning right next door to an industrial solar project, how could the application have even been accepted?

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Quote from the Lone Valley Solar "Park" website, which repeatedly calls the solar field a "farm:"

"Farm Fact #2

"Benefits to the Community

"Lone Valley Solar Park will benefit the community through local spending. Local environmental consultants, engineers and other contractors have been engaged throughout project development. Construction of the solar plant is anticipated to create over 150 construction jobs."

Our understanding of the word, "local," would be that people so engaged be living in Lucerne Valley, or at least nearby. The word was there were two, count em, two people hired who lived in LV, for security, and one had moved there to take the job.

The "local spending" (for accommodations? water and more water?) was not as promised. Workers' salaries left the valley, no workers' kids are in LV schools, no environmental consultants (incompetent or otherwise), engineers or other contractors' employees live in LV or pay property taxes in the area.

By the way, Lucerne Valley has repeatedly offered an alternative site for renewable energy projects, acceptable to the community. It's a large area called Tamarisk Flats near Lucerne Dry Lake, suitable for PV solar, level, stable clay-containing soil, naturally screened from view by tamarisks, crossed by existing SCE power lines, unsuitable for human habitation or other use. Official responses from utility, developers, Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Planners: **zero**.