

MBCA News  
Monday, April 14, 2014

No lack of news to communicate to you! If you are not already busy with hiking and gardening, attending these events will definitely fill your calendars!

**Mark your calendars to attend these upcoming events:**

**1) San Bernardino County Renewable Energy Plan workshop: Thursday, April 17, 6-8 PM.**

Location: Yucca Valley Community Center, Yucca Room.

*This is our first opportunity to give positive and proactive feedback to San Bernardino County at the beginning of an open process of defining our renewable energy future together. MBCA in conjunction with SPARC (San Bernardino County Partnership For Renewable Energy and Conservation) encourage you to use the information [here](#) to prepare your own statement to the County.*

SPARC's Vision: To utilize smart planning and sustainability concepts in a new Renewable Energy Element (REE) for the General Plan for San Bernardino County (SBC) that allows the enthusiastic, willing and able residents to build and benefit from distributed generation and rooftop solar. Talking points

**2) "Aquifers 101" by the U.S. Geological Survey: Friday, April 18, 2 to 4PM.**

Location: Joshua Tree Community Center, 6171 Sunburst Ave.

RSVP by April 15: 760-821-5716 or email: [kjradnich@jbwd.com](mailto:kjradnich@jbwd.com)

*To broaden understanding and answer questions about water issues specific to Morongo Basin.*

**3) Hi-Desert Nature Museum's "Earth Day Conservation Fair":**

**Saturday, April 19, 9AM-2PM.** Location: HDN Museum, Yucca Valley Community Center Complex. *MBCA will host a table. Register for the MBCA Landscape Tour!*

**4) MBCA Landscape Tour: Saturday, April 26, 9AM – 4PM.**

*Self-guided tour to over 20 sites in the Morongo Basin featuring examples of creative and desert-wise gardens and landscapes.*

Link [here](#) to register.

**5) "Solar Options for Homeowner": April 26, 10:30AM – 3PM.**

Location: Joshua Tree Community Center, 6171 Sunburst Ave.

*Free public expo hosted by Supervisor James Ramos; Property owners will meet solar power companies, contractors and lenders. Reps of County's Home Energy Renovation Opportunity program will be on hand with financing options for a variety of home energy upgrades.*

**Updates on posts from previous MBCA E-Blasts**

1) **The San Bernardino County Planning Department** sponsored community meeting on March 26 brought many of you out to for an update to the Joshua Tree Community Plan. Head of Planning Terri Rahhal welcomed the attendees and noted that the Alta Mira project near Friendly Hills is "still there." The Environmental Impact Statement is in process and when it is completed it will be posted on the County website. Ms. Rahhal's update to the JT planning process was limited to a handout listing the items that were brought forward at the previous meeting and identified the staffer subsequently

assigned as point person.

Phil Paule, Supervisor Ramos' Chief of Staff expressed excitement about moving the planning process forward and a commitment to turning the JT Plan into policy. The audience was then directed to the twenty community staff members hosting tables representing their departments, allowing residents to meet one-on-one. I heard from several who had fruitful conversations with staff in areas of their particular concern. Faces were associated with names, cards exchanged, etc. However, I also heard some disappointment that the follow-up from the podium on the JT Plan was limited to the handout and not discussed more fully with the audience.

Jason Jones, the Community Planning Coordinator explained to several of us at his table that the County is updating the County General Plan and will work with a number of communities to update their Specific Plans. He also explained that his department is working with the Board of Supervisors now to address the inequity that some communities in the County don't even have a Specific Plan in place. Local residents have expressed their desire to strengthen the Joshua Tree Specific Plan in relation to the Development Plan and to include a Formula Retail Ordinance to address corporate box store development. It remains to be seen how this will play out as the County Planners have a lot on their plates and limited resources to meet demands. JT will certainly have to remain vigilant to ensure their desires are addressed adequately. Supervisor Ramos has tasked the MAC with funneling concerns and suggestions regarding the JT Specific Plan updates.

2) **Morongo Unified School District** continues to explore options for solar installations at its facilities. The MUSD Board has formed a committee that includes MBCA Directors Steve Bardwell, Ruth Rieman, Marina West and MBCA Board of Advisors Frazier Haney.

3) **BLM meeting on Silurian Valley solar project:** Barstow, March 27 regarding the Spanish company Iberdrola's application to build a large scale photovoltaic and wind energy project in remote Silurian Valley north of Baker. This was the first project meeting to decide whether the project should go forward in a Variance Zone, outside of the agency-preferred Solar Energy Zones (SEZ).

During public comment period many asked why the BLM is allowing projects outside the SEZ to seek the application process. Many were also upset about the degradation of the public commenting process itself and questioned whether their comments really meant anything. BLM is no longer recording comments and recommended that the public write all comments down and hand in written sheets of paper or send e-mails to ensure they would be considered.

BLM stated this was a low-priority application with no timeline. Several months may elapse before a formal review would be started. The BLM state director will decide to either proceed or deny the application, in concurrence with the national director, who could independently deny the application.

MBCA sent a comment letter voicing concerns about allowing this project to continue. The National Park Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and California Department of Fish and Wildlife have also written comment letters. Objections focus on impacting this relatively undisturbed habitat for numerous special status species, the lack of surveys of many birds and wild plants, and the number of golden eagle nests in the area. For a synopsis of the comments: [Basin and Range Watch](#).

***Great work Pat Flanagan! The birds love you and so do we!***

MBCA board member Pat Flanagan wrote an [essay](#) (March 22, 2014 post) about the citizen-scientist website [www.eBird.org](http://www.eBird.org) hosted by Cornell University. She encouraged people to explore where birds find refuge in the desert, whether for a few hours, a season or a lifetime.

Because of Pat's growing concern that migratory bird species are not given the protection they are guaranteed under the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918 she used eBird when commenting on the proposed Soda Mountain Solar Project. Recently alarmed again by the proposed Silurian Valley Project she compared ten eBird hotspots from Death Valley to the Salton Sea to find out just how many birds use the desert portion of the Pacific Flyway. Pat is now sharing her work with federal and state agencies and non-governmental organizations active in migratory bird conservation and the placement of industrial solar facilities in our desert. Highlights of her findings:

\* 428 bird species use the desert portion of the Pacific Flyway at some time during the year;

\* Death Valley National Park has 315 species, the Salton Sea has 338 species, and the two sites have 252 species in common.

We are indebted to Pat's vigilance, insights and scientific research. If you are interested in knowing more details of these bird studies, you may contact her directly: [patflanagan29@gmail.com](mailto:patflanagan29@gmail.com)

Thanks for your continuing interest and support!

Sarah Kennington, President

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[www.mbconservation.org](http://www.mbconservation.org)

*MBCA advocates for a healthy desert environment  
that nurtures our rural character, cultural wealth,  
and economic well-being.*