Re: Draft Bakersfield RMP Amendment and Supplemental EIS

Dear Interior Secretary Bernhardt:

The Board of Trustees at the Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara recently learned of the possibility that the federal moratorium on oil and gas production on public lands could end. That would result in reopening more than one million acres of mineral estate and public land to oil extraction. Frankly, we were alarmed.

Unitarian Universalists (UU) affirm seven principles to guide our lives as moral individuals. Our seventh UU principle affirms respect for the interdependent web of existence of which we are all a part. This means we seek to protect the Earth, and all life, to sustain it for future generations.

Oil extraction (oil drilling, fracking and other methods of enhanced oil production) has serious negative consequences for our community. They are a terrible use of our limited water supply. Our community already struggles daily to conserve this precious resource. These processes pollute the air, directly harm children and adults in our community, and contaminate our ground and surface water. Oil extraction methods not only affect our human community, but nearby wildlife and the land in which we all live. This means we cannot stand silent when we see imminent danger to the entire web of life – danger from oil extraction.

After listening to the public comments at the May 23 meeting in Santa Barbara, it became clear that the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Study was not complete nor comprehensive. Katie Davis of the Los Padres Chapter of the Sierra Club noted the study only covers fracking and not other enhanced oil production methods. She also listed many important topics that were either not adequately addressed or addressed at all, including the effects of these methods on climate change, public health and safety, air quality, seismicity, renewable resources, socioeconomics, cultural resources, spills, and transportation of extracted oil to market. Her concerns are important and should be addressed.

Most troubling of all, opening up more than a million acres of mineral estate and public land to oil production ignores the climate crisis that has directly impacted the very counties in which the public land lies. Devastating wildfires and drought in these counties are directly caused by the burning of the carbon fuel being extracted. We should be focusing our time and energy on ways to use less oil and gas instead of ways to produce more.
Our fifth UU principle affirms the right of conscience and the use of the democratic process. After reflecting on our values, we strive to do what is morally right. The morally right thing for us to do is to publicly speak out on this issue. Our society must change the way it depends on fossil fuels. This dependence makes our world less livable now, with increased extreme weather that affects the safety of our community. We must encourage all opportunities to create safe, clean, renewable energy.

We join so many others in the faith community world-wide, from Thich Nhat Hanh to Pope Francis to Patriarch Bartholomew I of Constantinople to the Archbishop of Canterbury to indigenous spiritual leaders, who believe this is the morally right thing to do for the health, safety, and viability of our communities and the world.

Our first UU principle affirms the worth and dignity of every person. That means everybody matters: the people experiencing the effects of climate change now, including the Chumash and other native tribes; our children and future generations that deserve a livable planet; and the workers in the oil and gas industry and their families. These workers deserve opportunities to train for and transition to new jobs so they can support their families.

The Board of Trustees of the Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara strongly and without reservation opposes the Bureau of Land Management’s current proposal and supports making the federal moratorium on oil and gas production on public lands and mineral estates permanent.

Thank you for this opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

Board of Trustees, Unitarian Society of Santa Barbara

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