Desert Renewable Energy Conservation Plan Update

Amy L. Fesnock

Mojave Ground Squirrel TAC Meeting

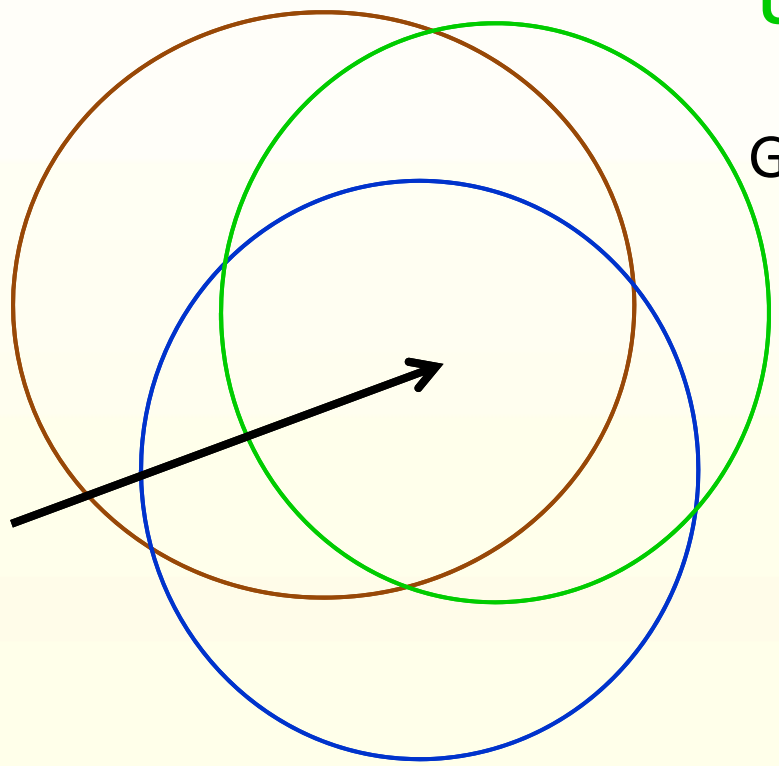
March 5, 2014

What is the DRECP?

DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

Bureau of Land Management
Land Use Plan Amendments

US Fish and Wildlife Service
General Conservation Plan (ESA)



DRECP

Calif. Dept of Fish & Wildlife
Natural Communities Conservation Plan

DRECP Scope and Objective

DRECP Scope

- 22.5 million-acre planning area
- Federal, state, and private lands

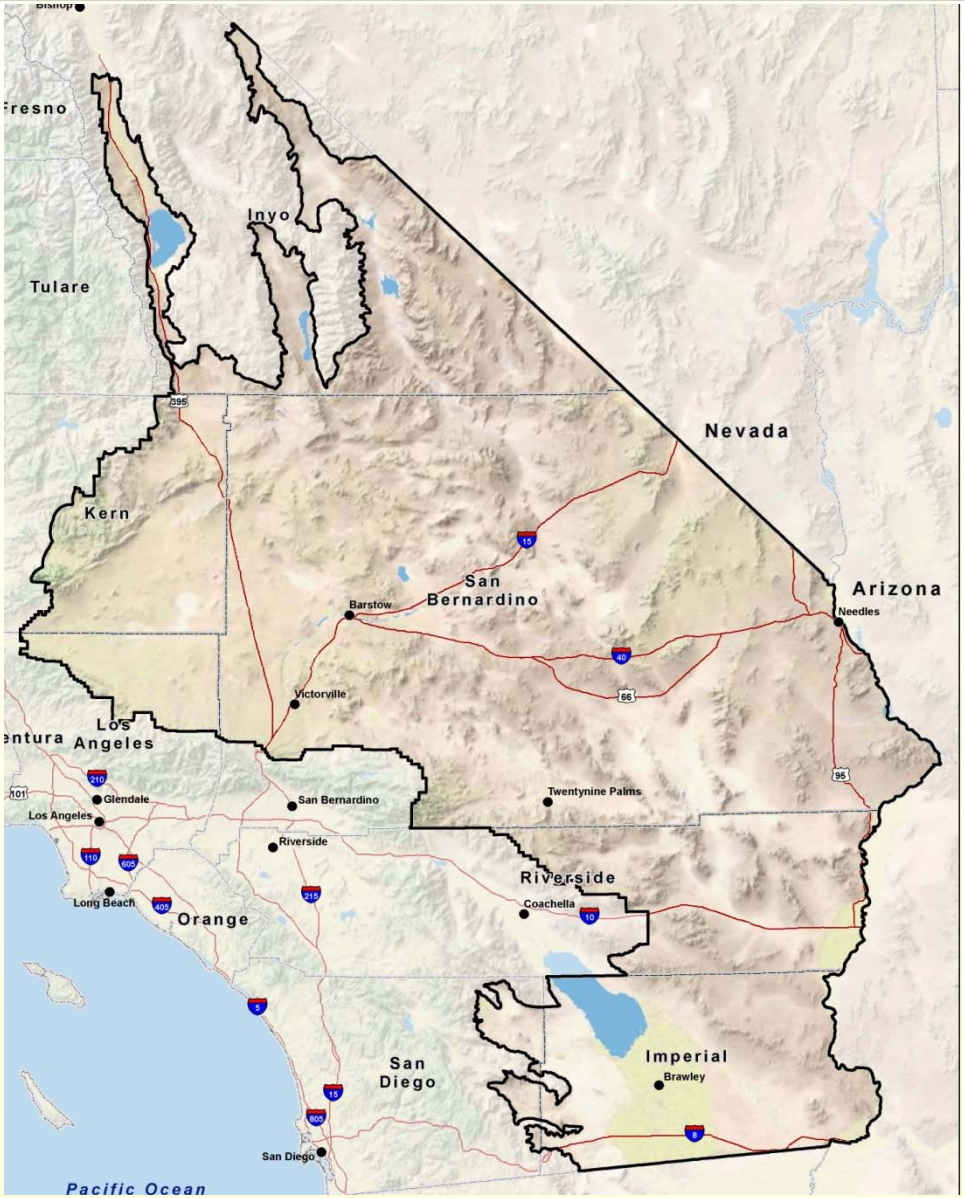
DRECP Objective

- Respond to California's renewable energy targets through 2040

DRECP Plan Area

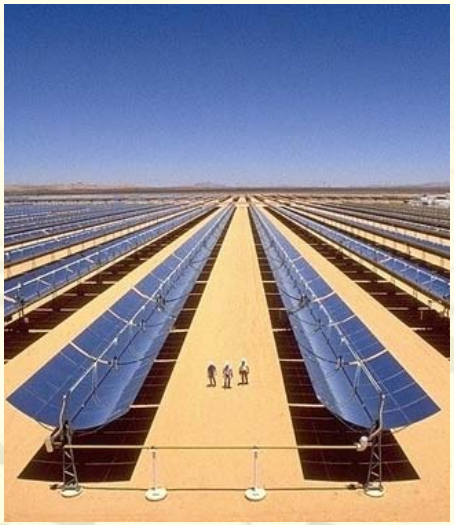
DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

- Mojave & Colorado Desert Eco-regions
- Counties include:
  - Imperial
  - Inyo
  - Kern
  - Los Angeles
  - Riverside
  - San Bernardino
  - San Diego



Proposed Energy Activities

- Utility-scale (20 MW+) renewable energy projects



DRECP Natural Resources

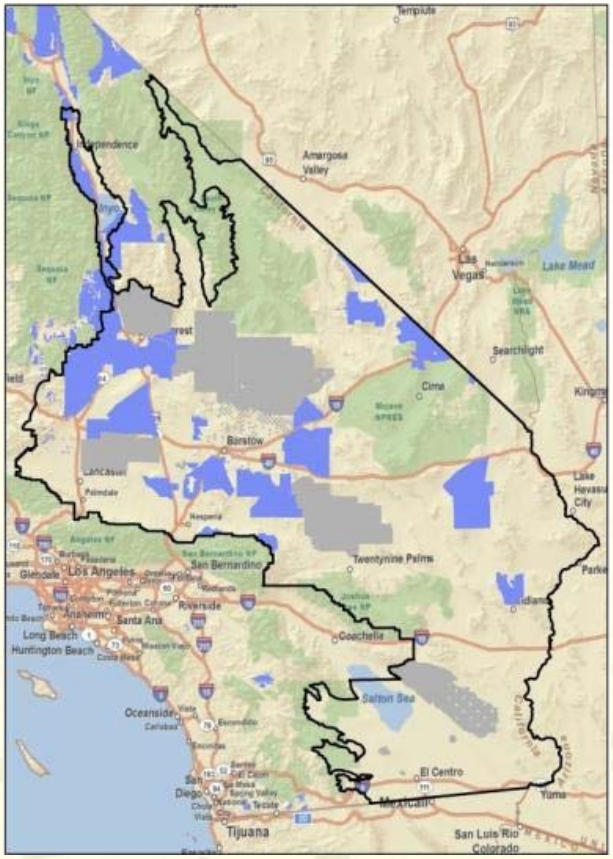
DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

- 6 natural communities
  - desert scrub & chaparral, dune, mountain & foothill woodland, wetlands, riparian, grassland & agriculture
- ~77 different plant and animal focus species
- Habitat connectivity and Ecosystem Function

Other Resources & Interests

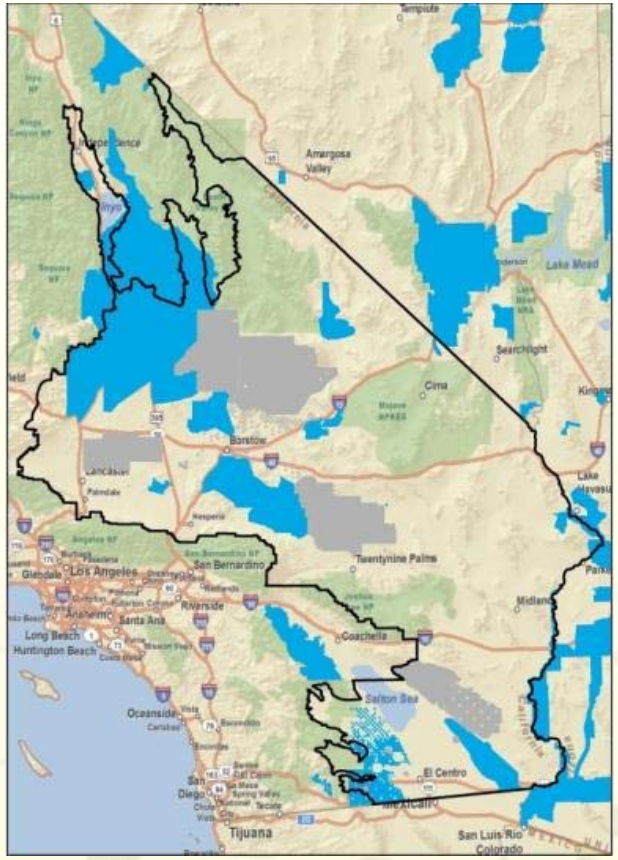
DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

Grazing Allotments



Herd Mgmt Areas

SRMAs



Military, Tribal, Cultural, Visual, Wilderness, Minerals, etc…

Biological Conservation

Plan-wide Biological Goals and Objectives

- at the landscape, natural community, and species levels

Plan-wide Conservation Management Actions

- at the landscape, natural community, and species levels
- Avoidance and Minimization Measures
  - Buffers, time restrictions, etc.
- Compensation
  - Land acquisition
  - habitat enhancement actions

Biological Reserve Design

Biological Reserve Design

Started with Existing Conditions

- Conservation: ACECs, DWMAs, Wilderness, NPS lands
- Exclusions: Military Lands, Open OHV, Mining, etc

Conducted GAP analysis

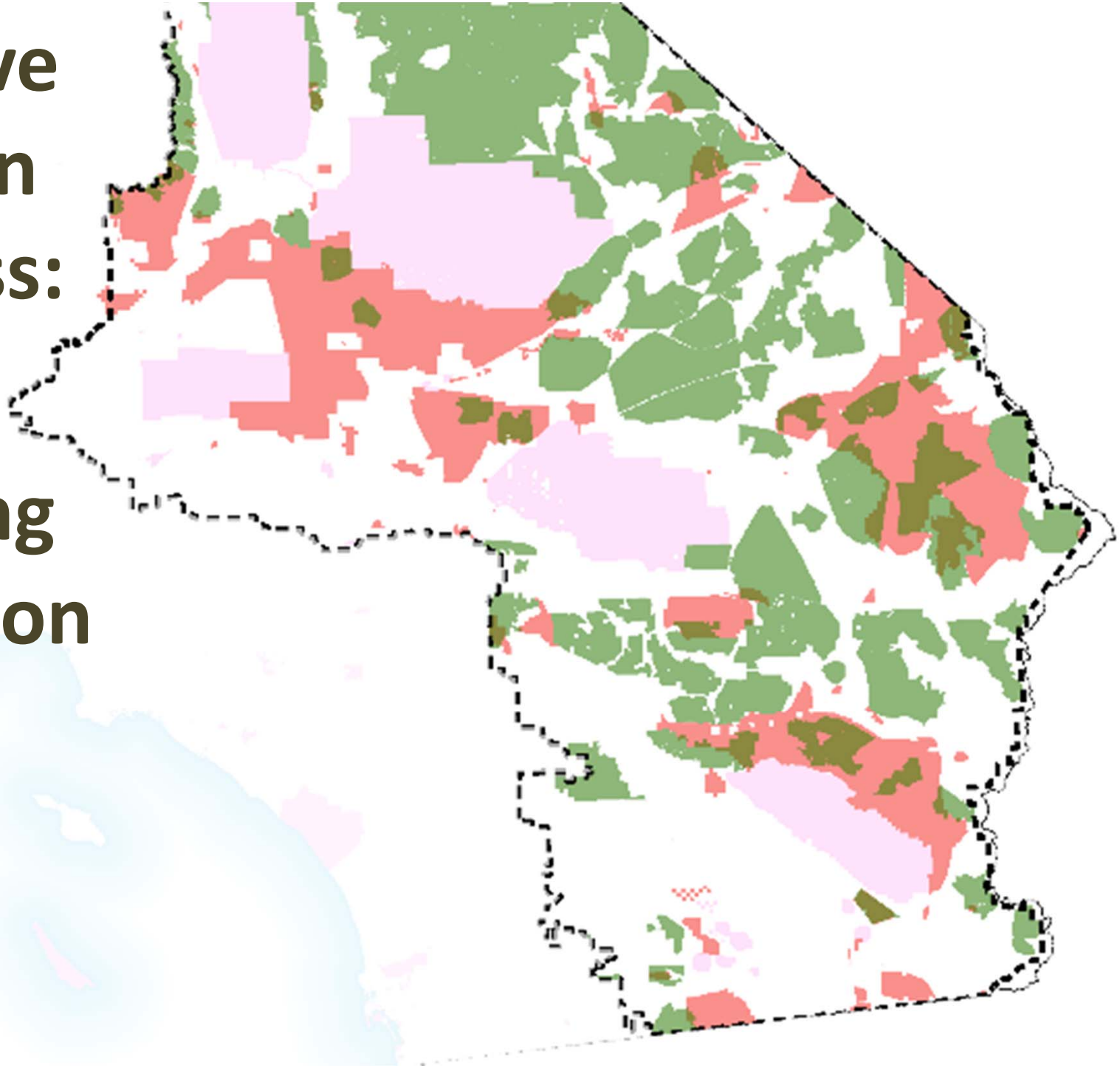
Conducted MARXAN analysis

Additional "layered" analysis

- Species Habitat and Distribution,
- Natural Communities/Features
- Large habitat blocks/core areas
- Linkages/corridors
- Geologic/Environmental Process

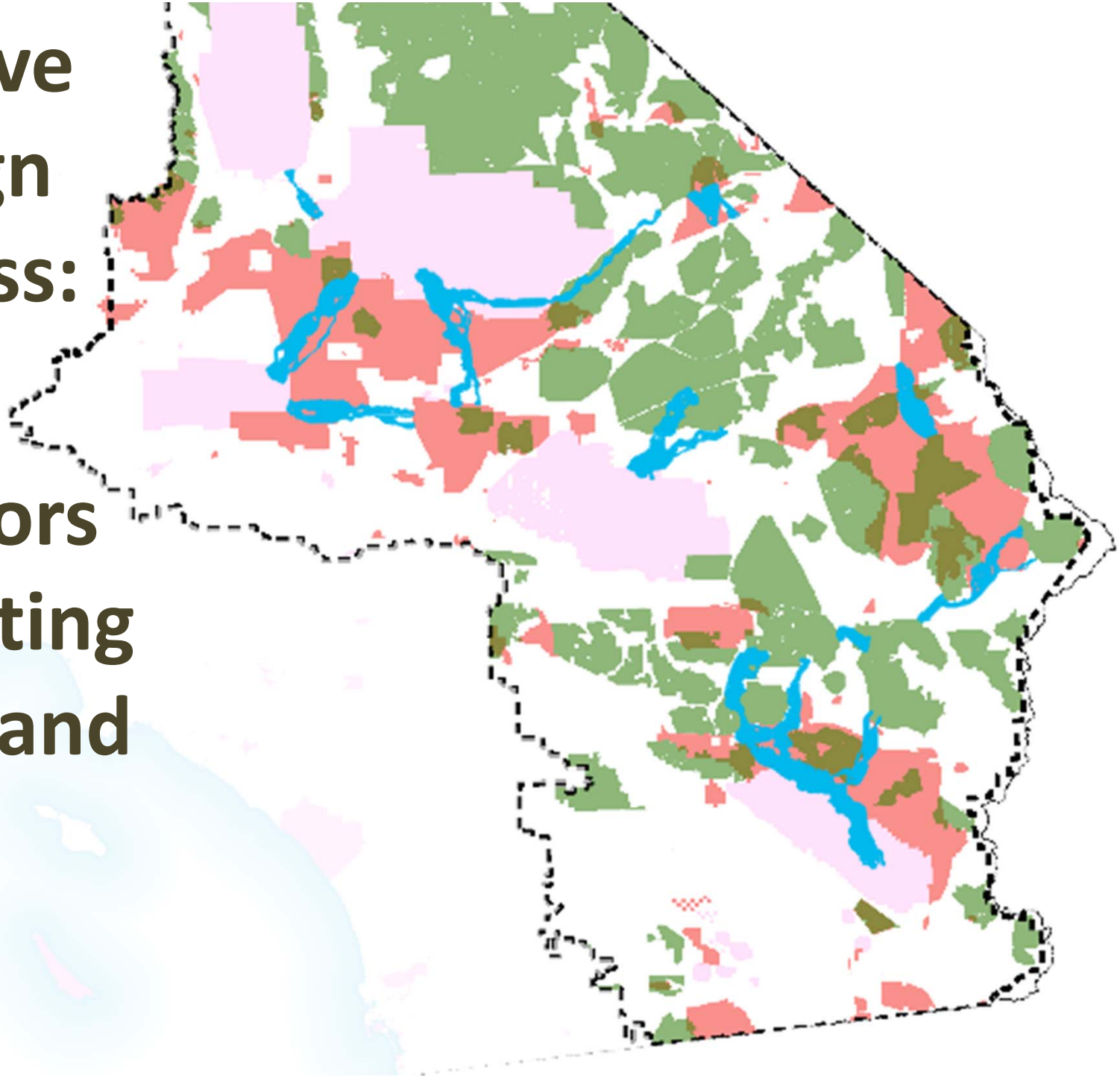
Reserve Design Process:

Existing Condition



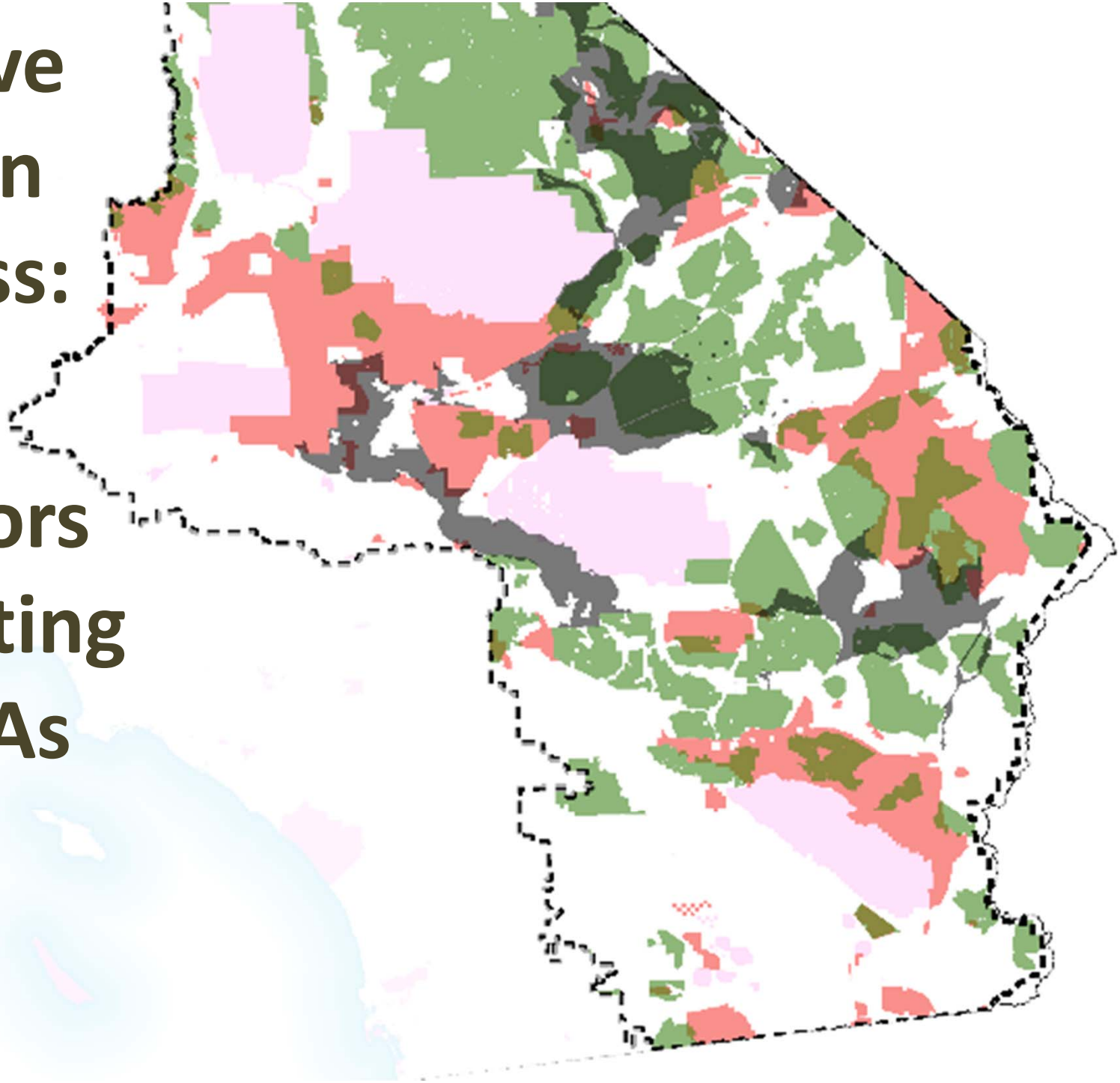
Reserve Design Process:

Corridors Connecting Intact Land



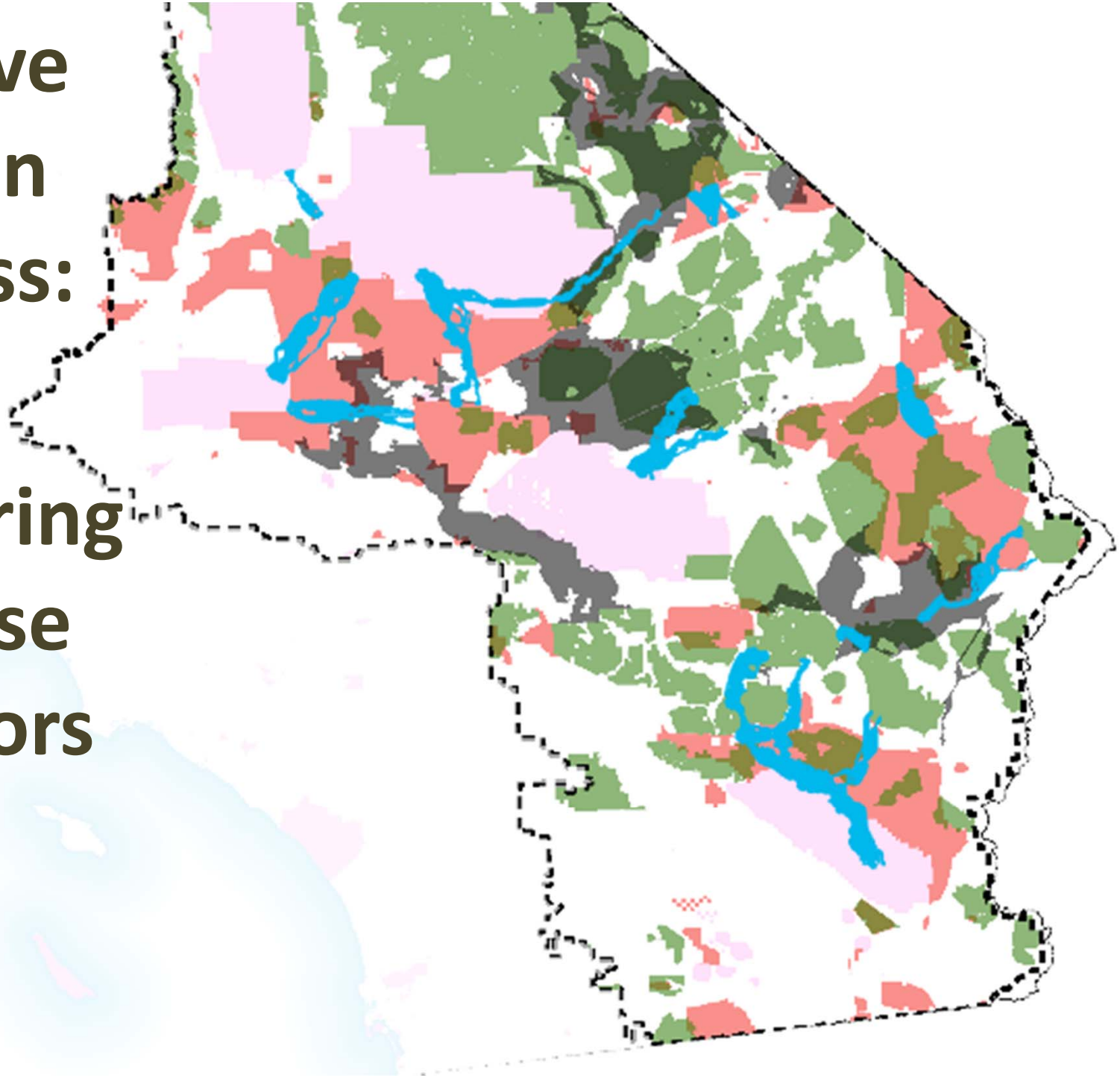
Reserve Design Process:

Corridors Connecting DWMAs



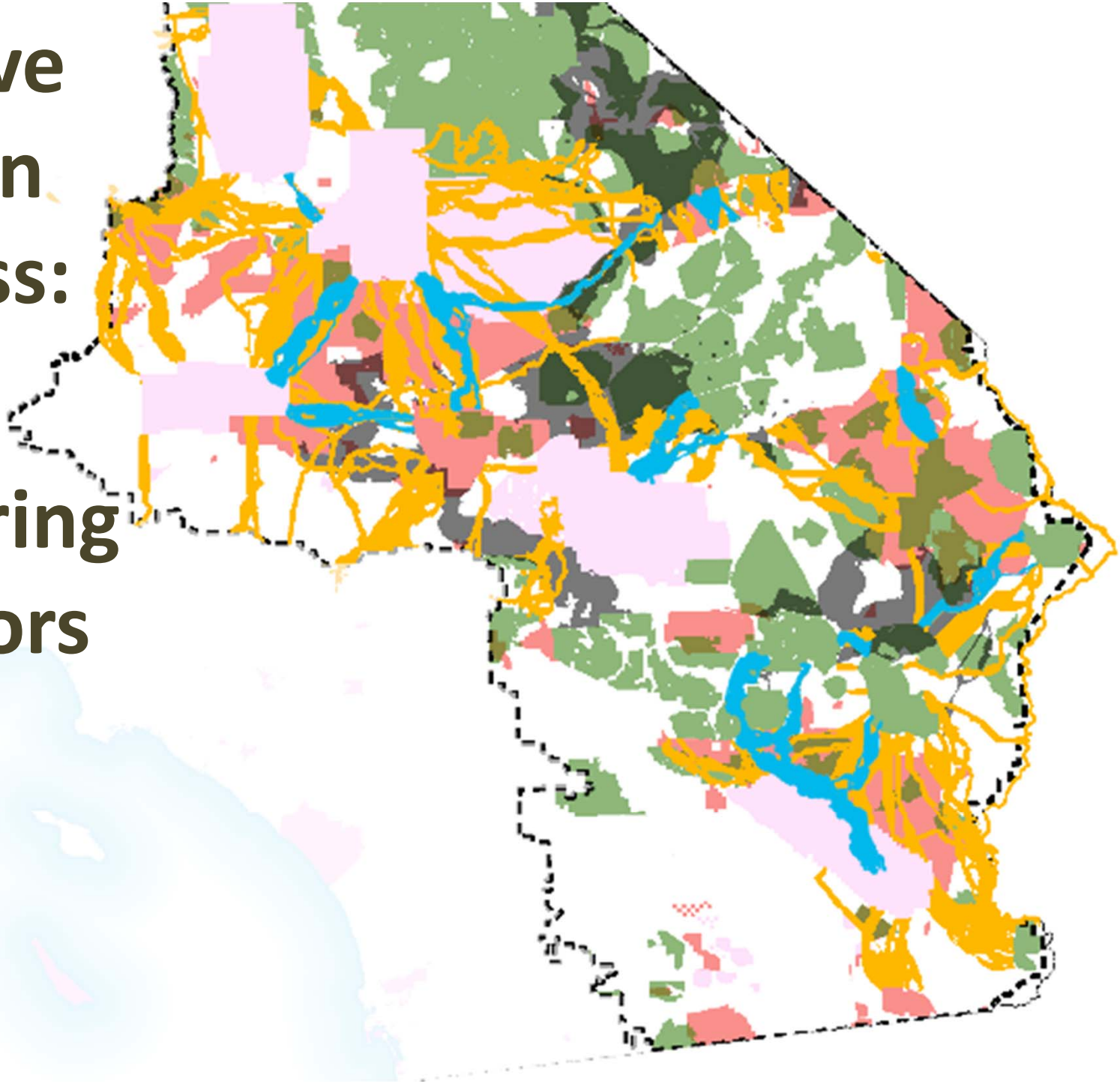
Reserve Design Process:

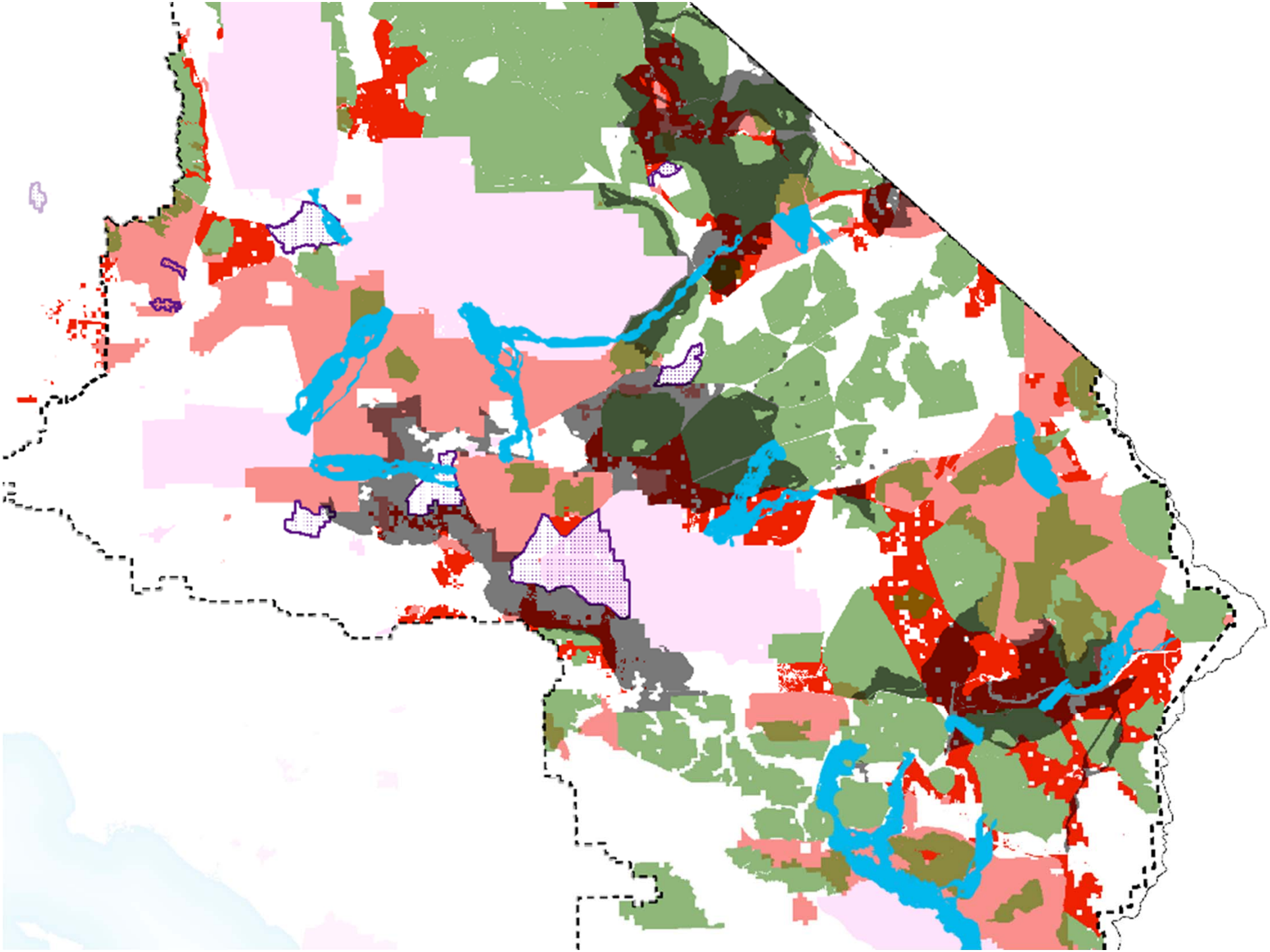
Comparing Tortoise Corridors



Reserve Design Process:

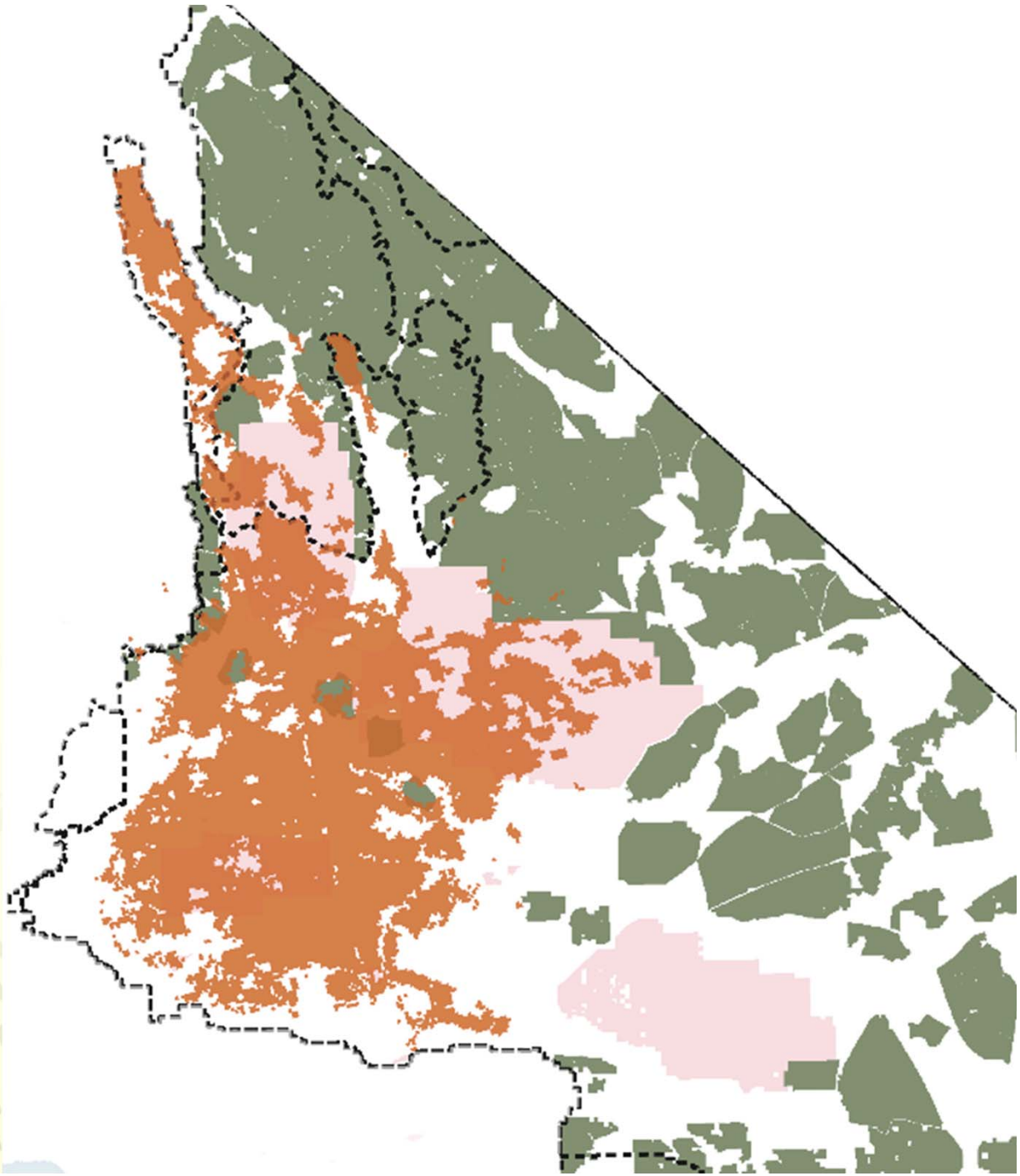
Comparing Corridors





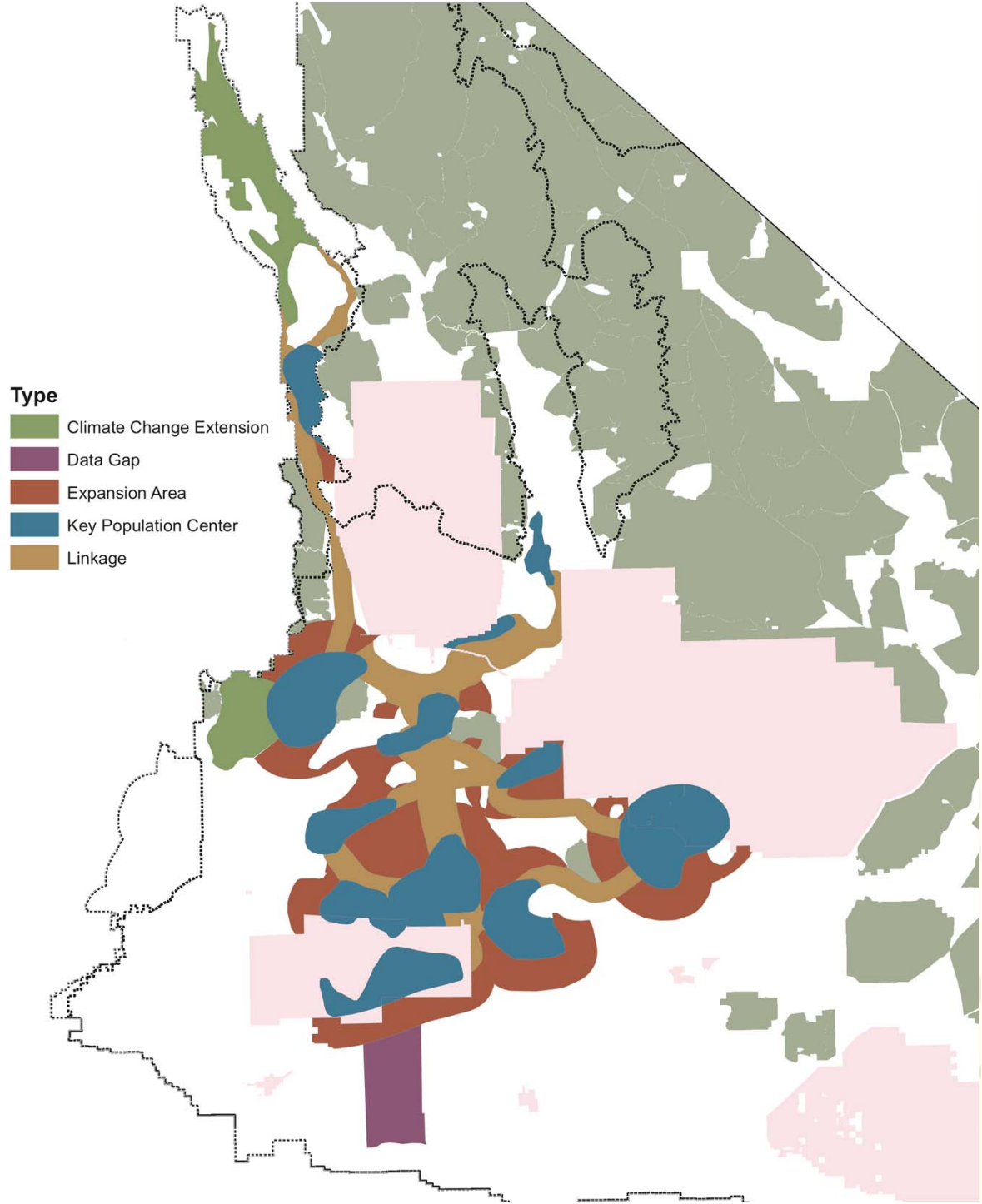
Reserve Design Process:

MGS Habitat Model



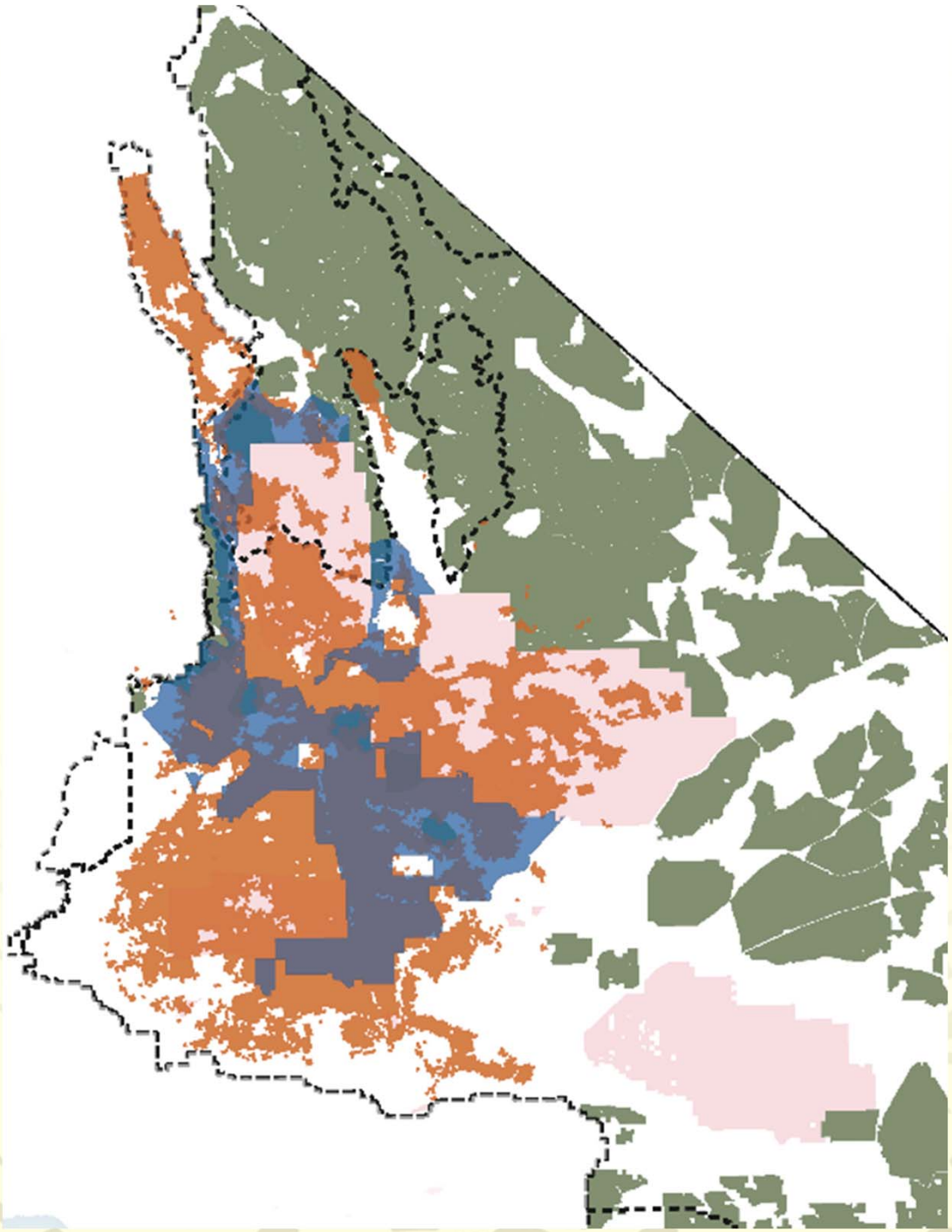
Reserve Design Process:

MGS Model+



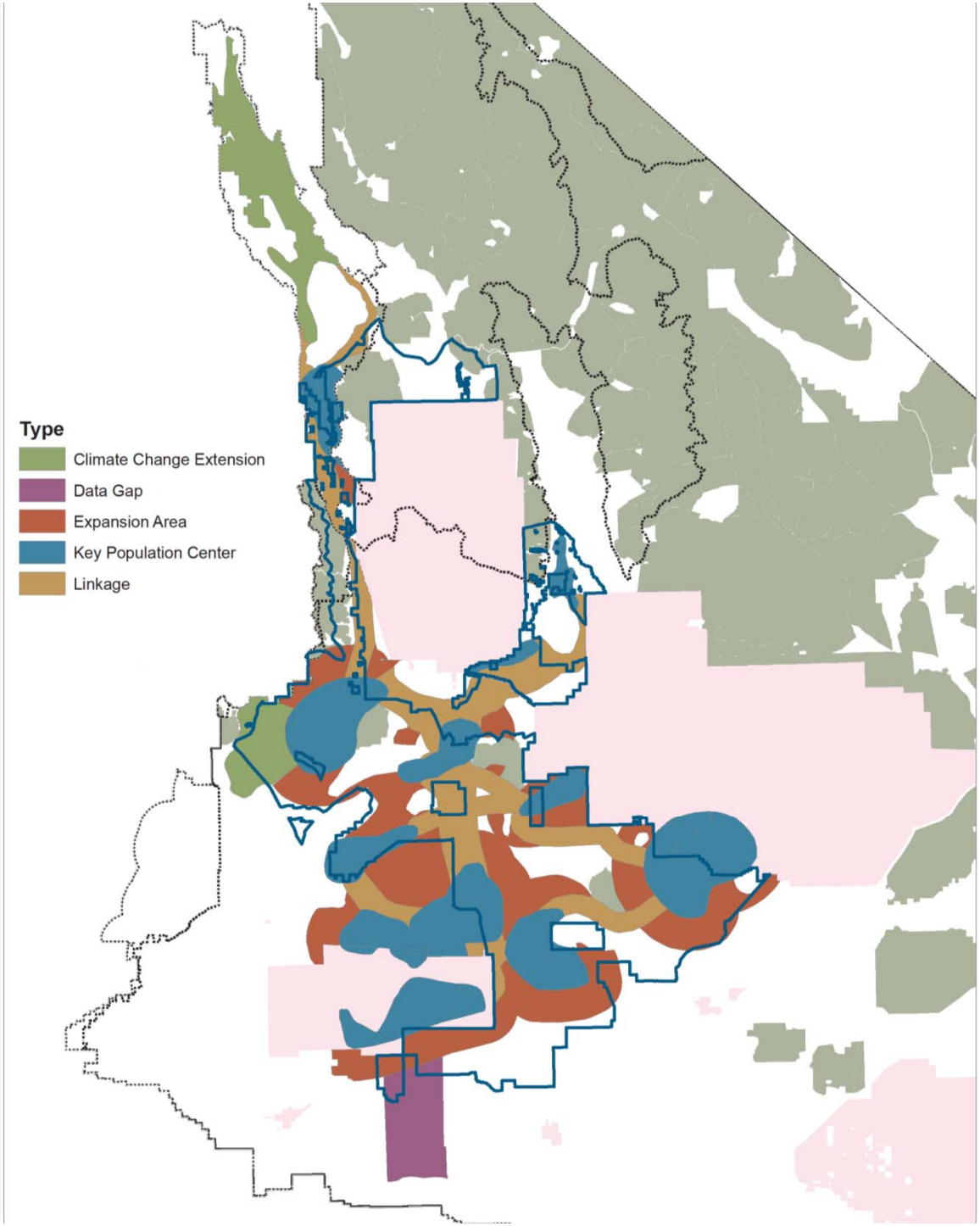
Reserve Design Process:

Comparing Model to Existing MGS MA



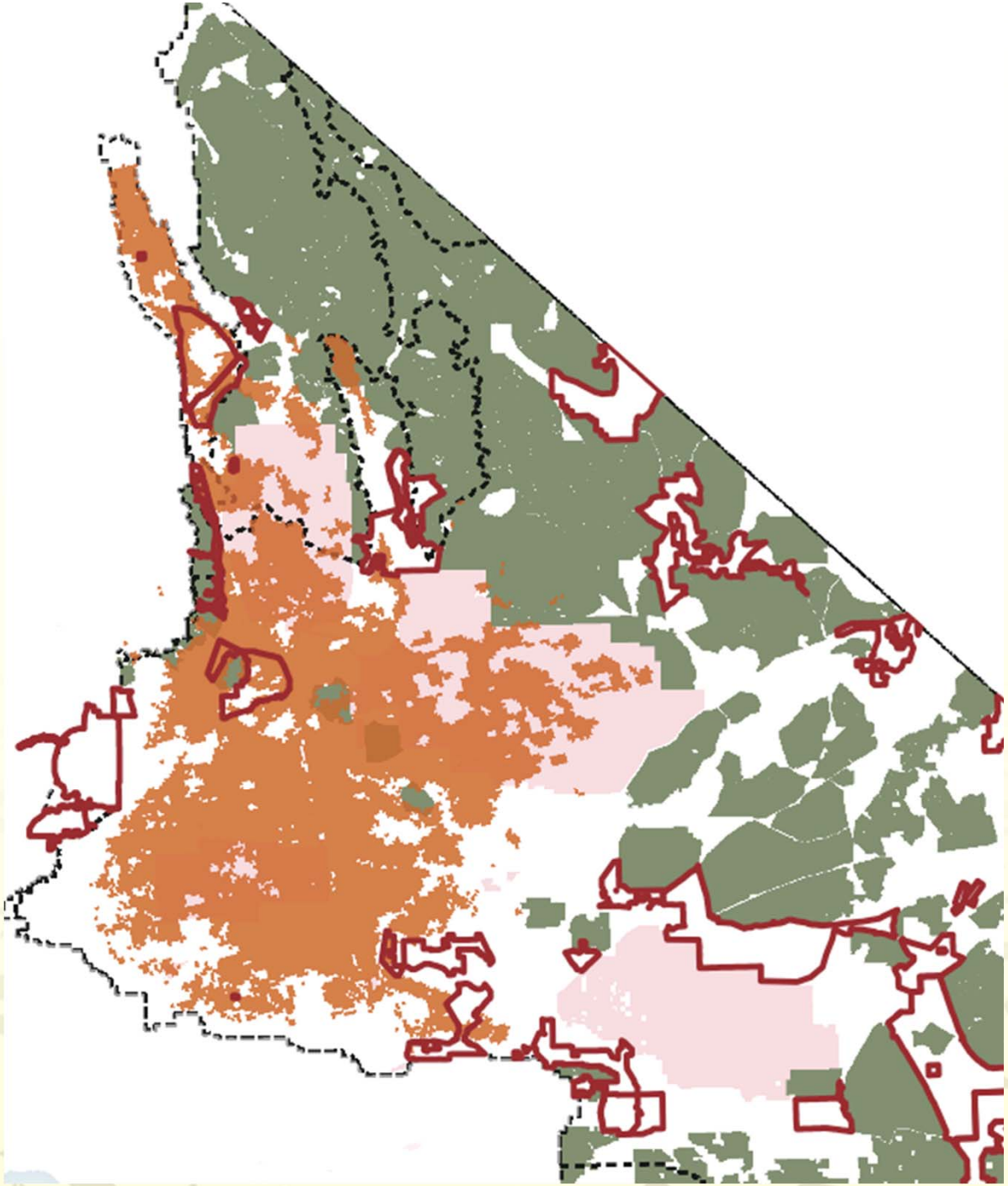
Reserve Design Process:

Comparing Model+ to Existing MGS MA



Reserve Design Process:

Model Compared to New ACECs



Development Planning Process

- For 2040, CEC estimates an expected reasonable range of generation capacity required from the DRECP area is ~ 20,000 – 22,000 MWs.

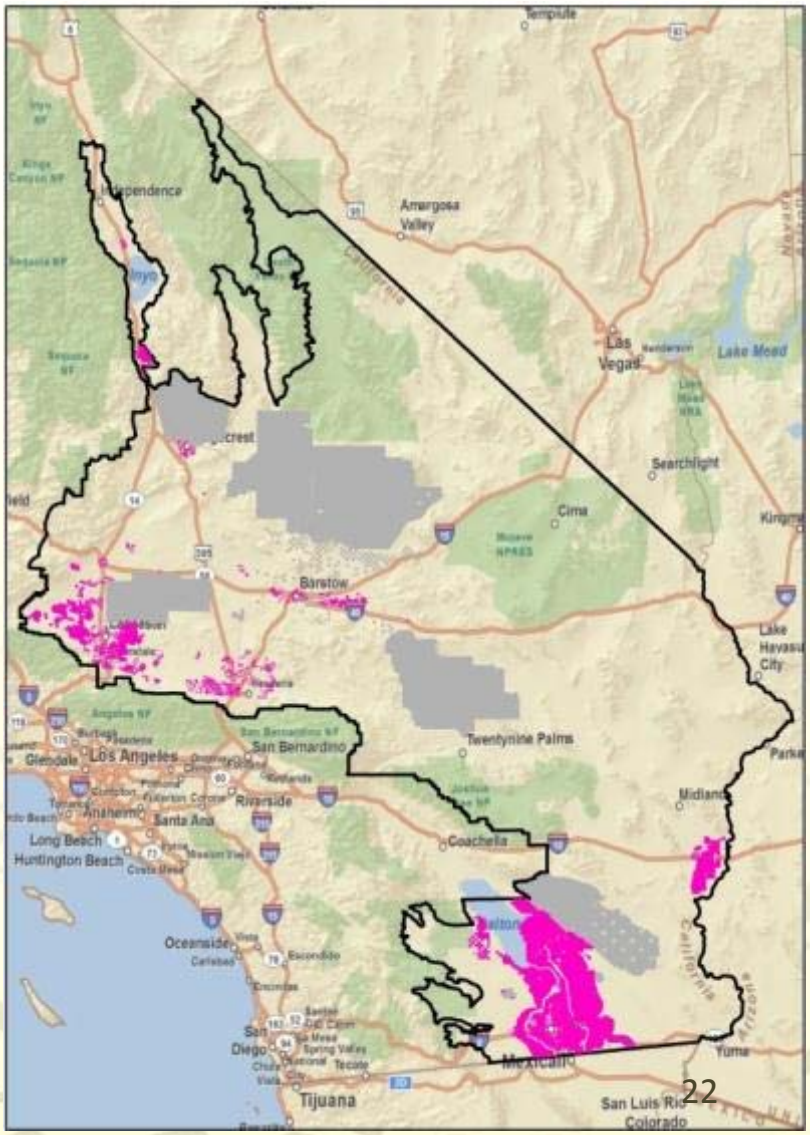
- Estimated acreage of development footprint to accommodate this level of renewable generation ranges from ~200,000 – 500,000 acres.

- Development Focus Areas are larger than estimated development footprint acreages, to allow for proper sighting of projects (10-50%)

Sample Alt 1

Summary:

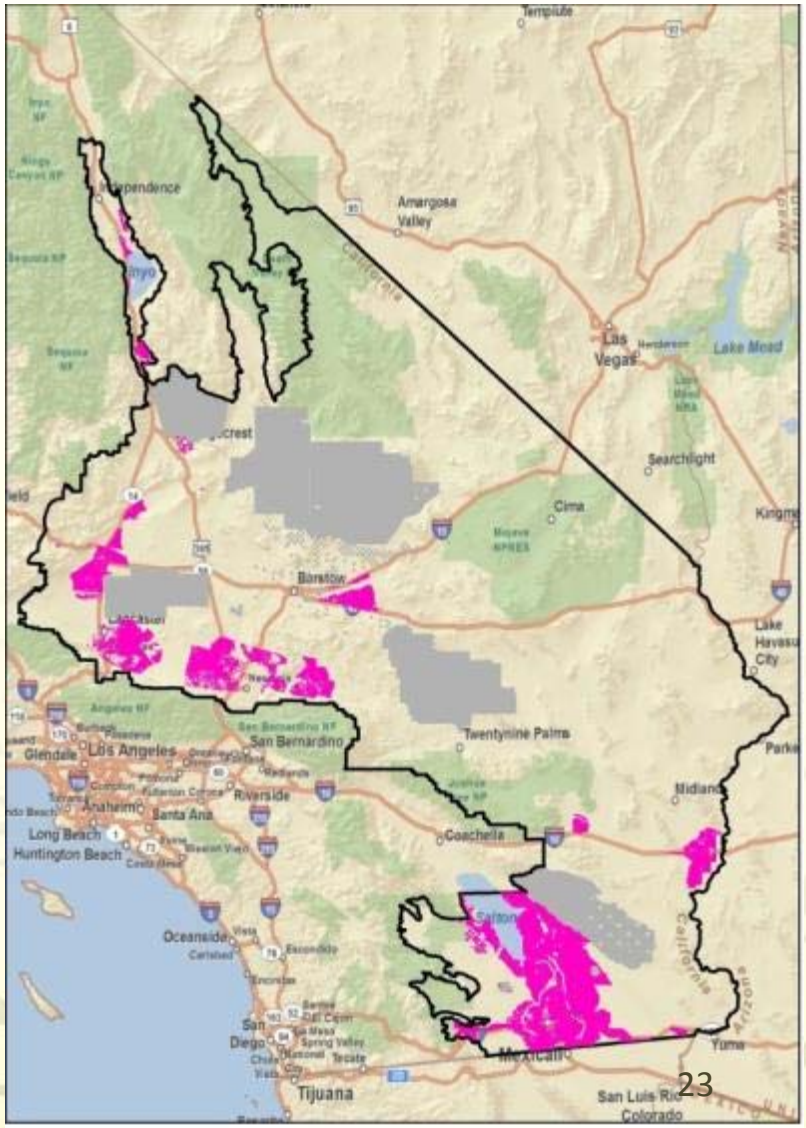
- 1,100,000 acres of DFAs
- Development of highly disturbed lands
- Limited development flexibility
- Minimum resource conflicts
    - Minimal additional protected federal lands



Sample Alt 2

Summary:

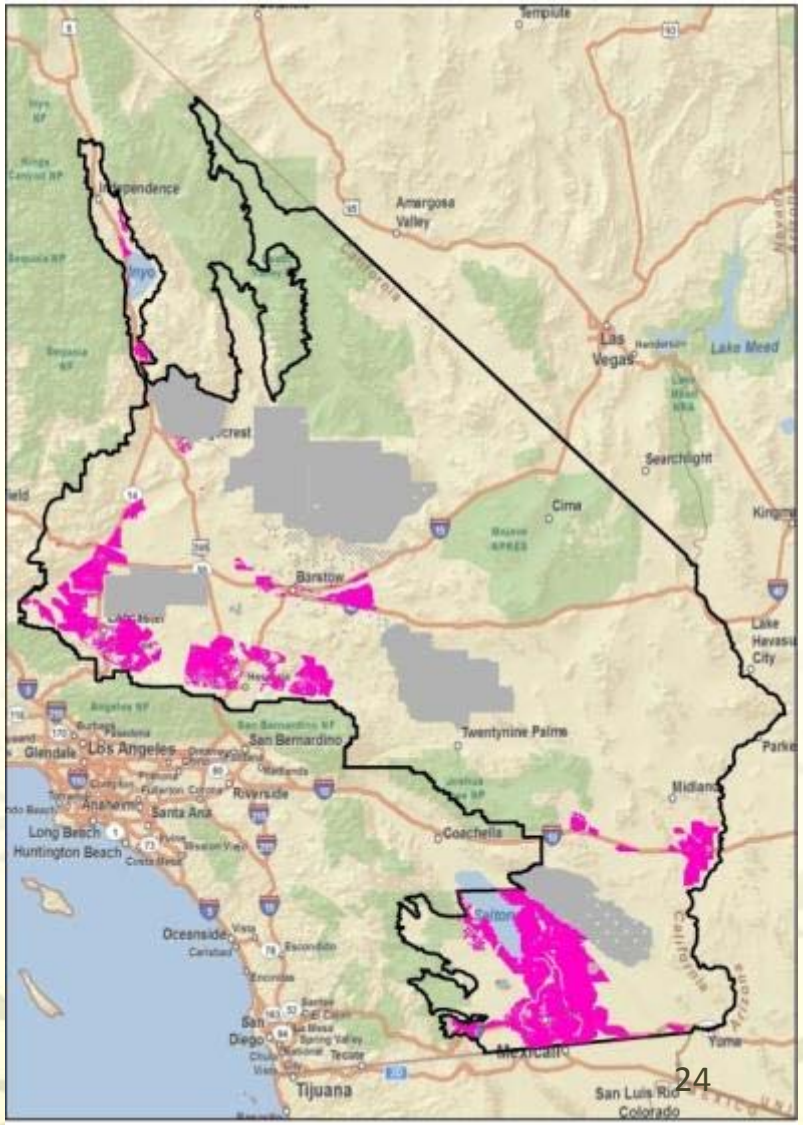
- 1,500,000 acres of DFAs
- Lands from Alt 1 plus lands from agency field reconnaissance
- More development flexibility, but still “limited”
- Minimized resource conflicts
    - Some increases in federal land conservation



Sample Alt 3

Summary:

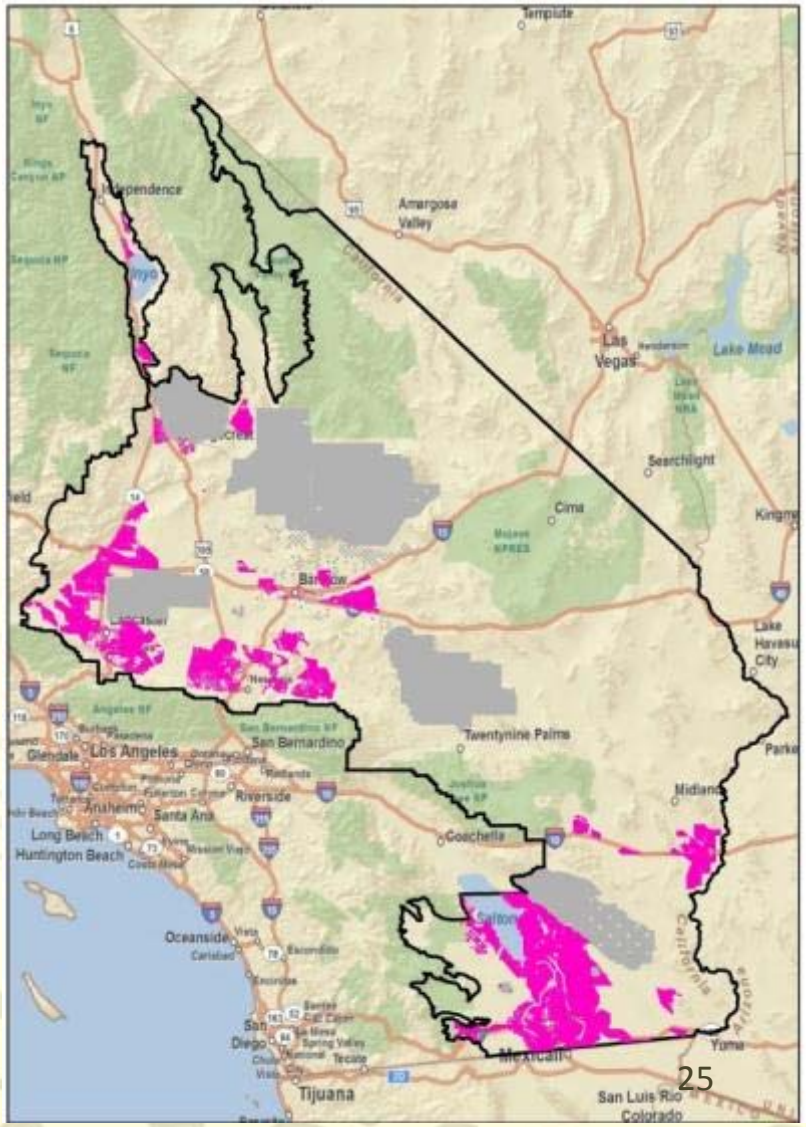
- 1,700,000 acres of DFAs
- Increased development areas and incorporation of military concerns
- More development flexibility in some areas (less in others)
- More potential for impact of resources
    - Increased federal land reserves



Sample Alt 4

Summary:

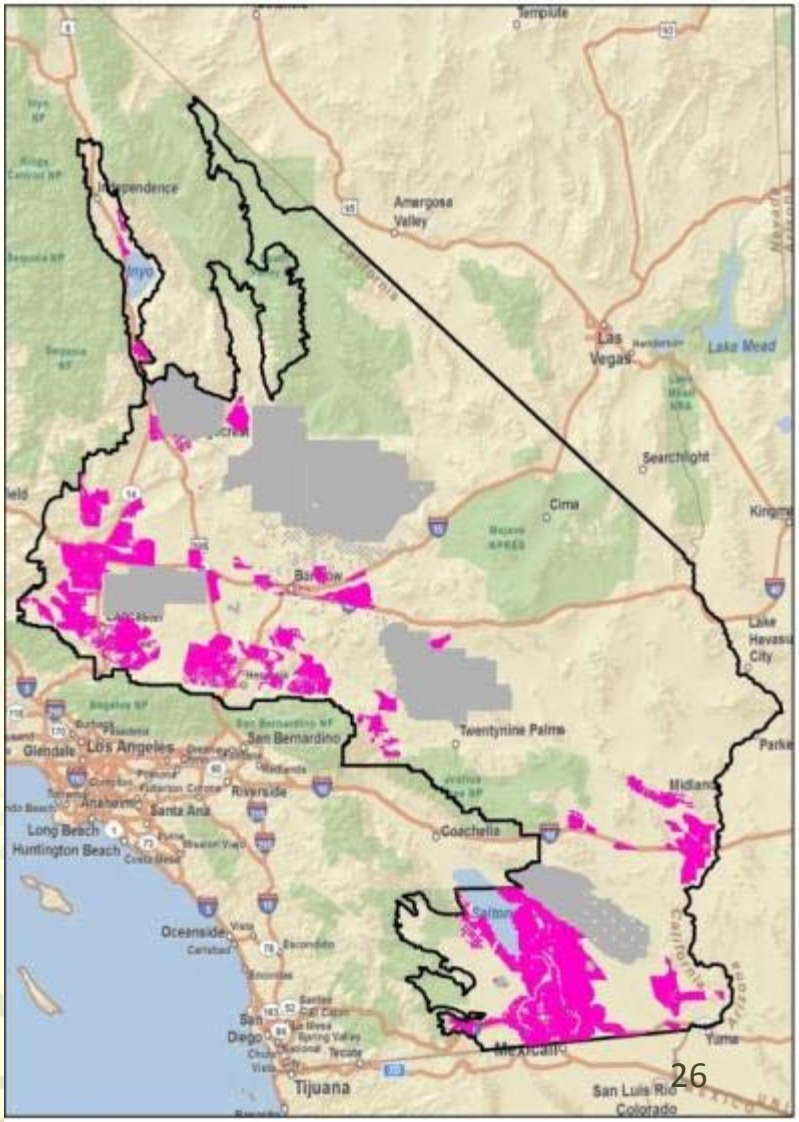
- 1,900,000 acres of DFAs
- Increase development zones, increased flexibility
- Increased potential for conflicts with high value resources
- Increased conservation lands
    - Increased protection on Federal lands



Sample Alt 5

Summary:

- 2,300,000 acres of DFAs
- Expanded development potential, with maximum flexibility
- Highest potential conflict with high value resources
- Largest federal conservation system
    - More restrictive management



The Range of the Alternatives

- Streamlined "Development Focus Areas" range from 1.1 million to 2.3 million acres
  - "constrained" to more "dispersed"
- DFAs on BLM lands between 82,000 and 621,000 acres
- Varying mixes of new or expanded ACECs and NLCS units created to meet conservation goals, up to 5.3 million acres of NLCS
  - Disturbance caps from 0.25 to 1%
  - Clear articulation that renewable energy development is not compatible with conservation in these areas

Do I support the DRECP?

Do I *really* think it improves the current condition?

YES

Current BLM Status

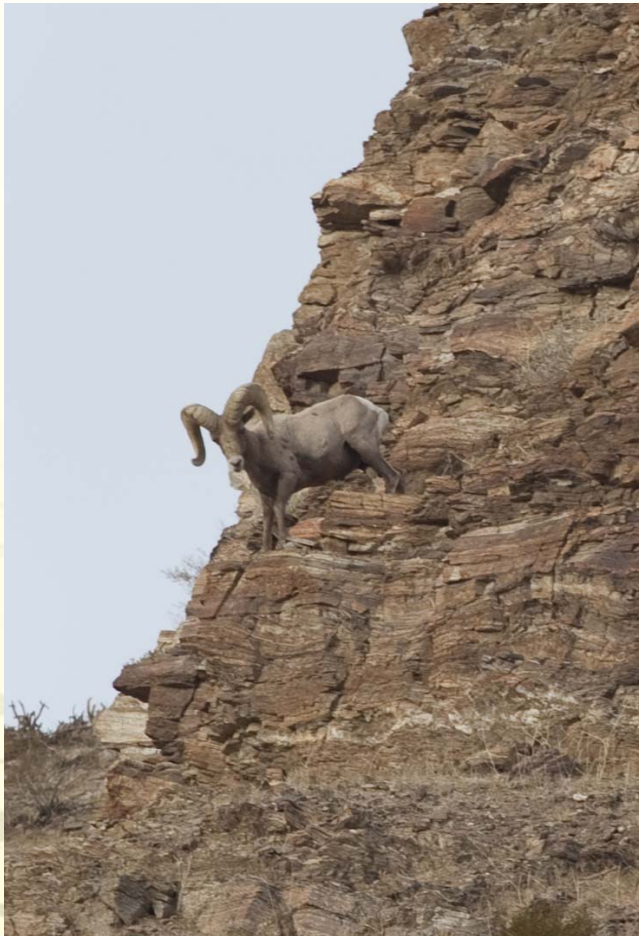
Renewable Energy Development

- Solar limited to Solar Energy Zones (SEZ) and Variance Lands
- Wind (case by case, no restrictions)
- Transmission Corridors Identified

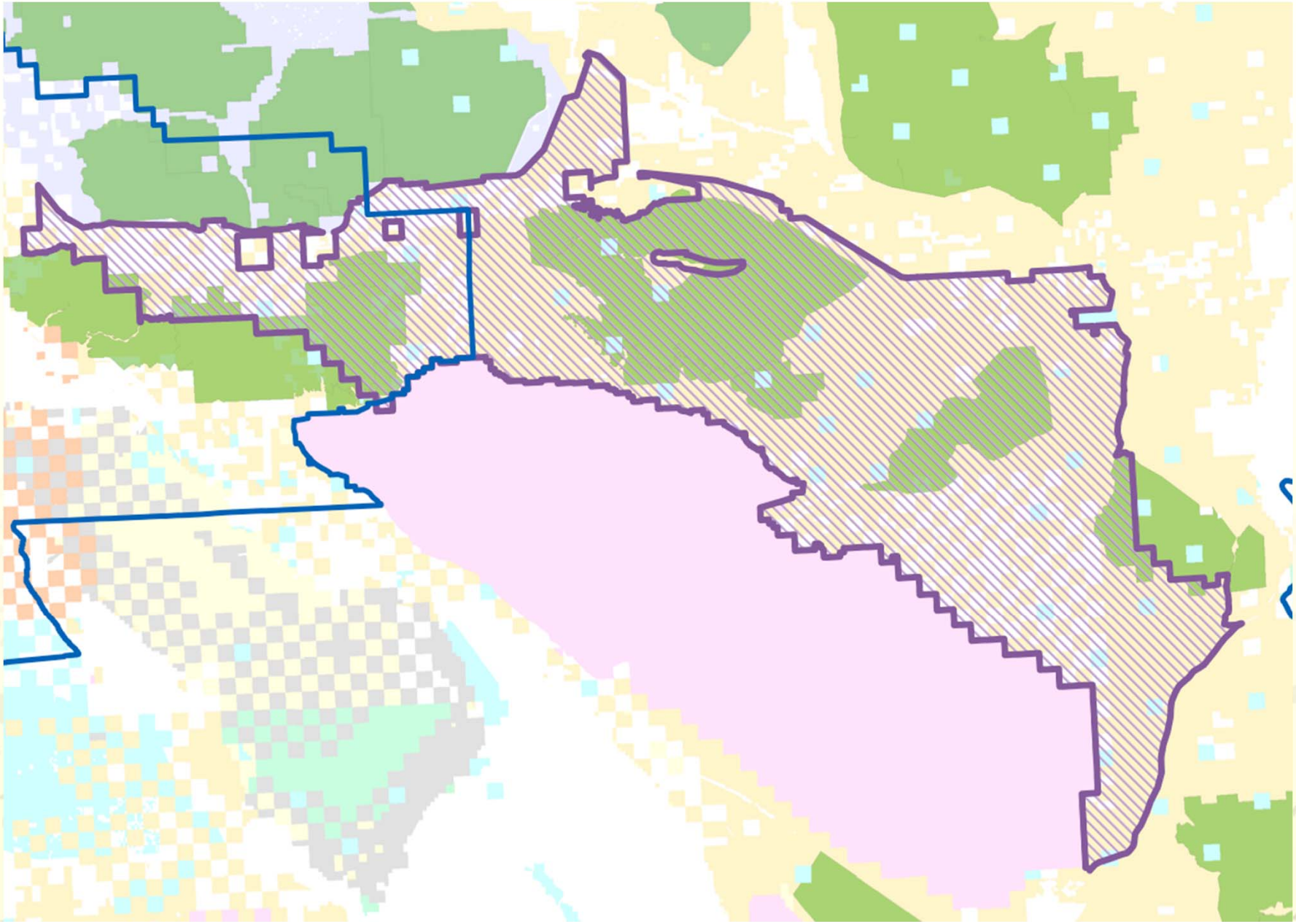
Conservation Lands

- ACECs
- DWMAs

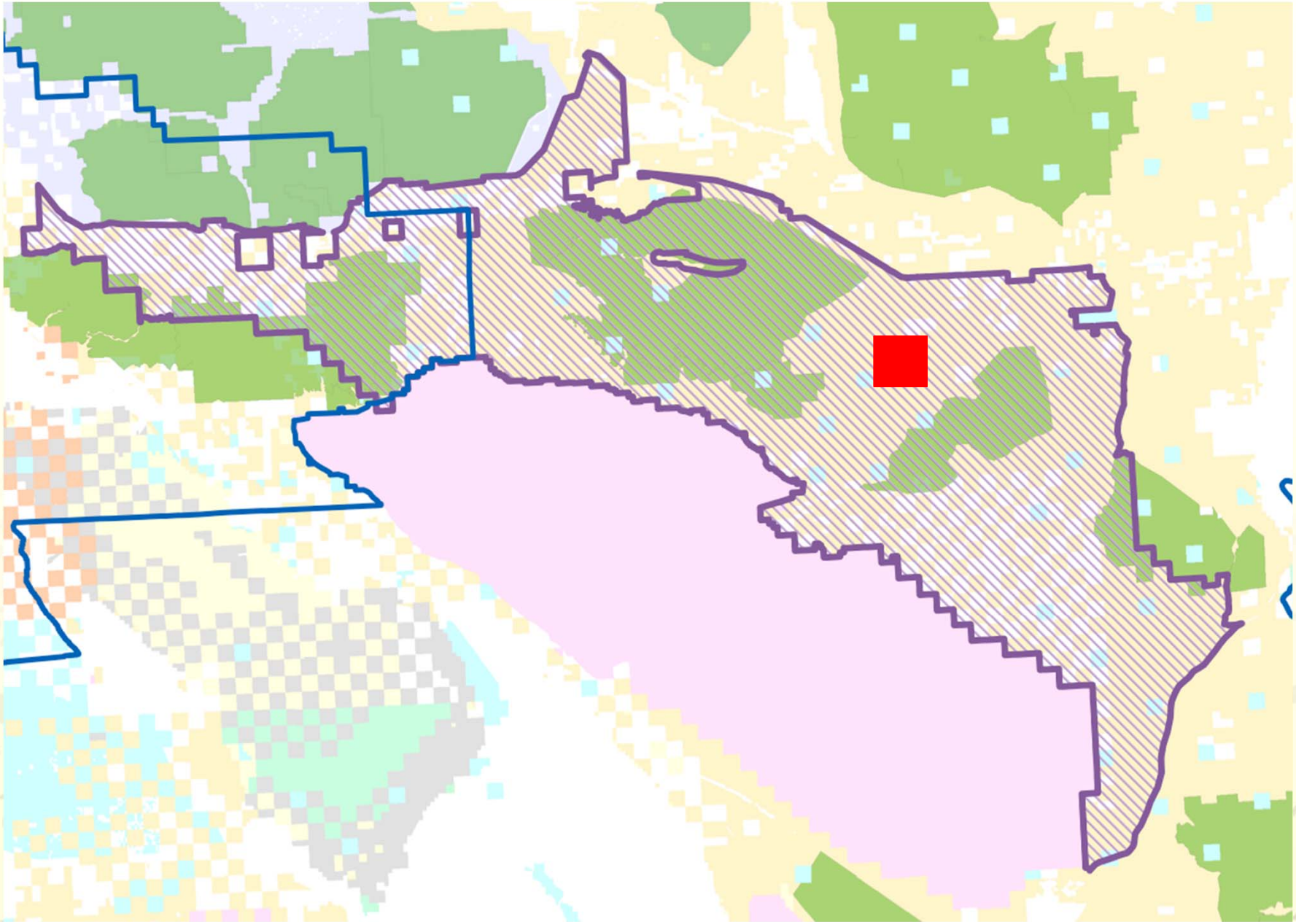
  Definition morphed between NEMO, NECO, and WEMO
- 1% development cap
  - First come, first serve
  - Only of actual ground disturbance
  - No mechanism to “save” it for future use



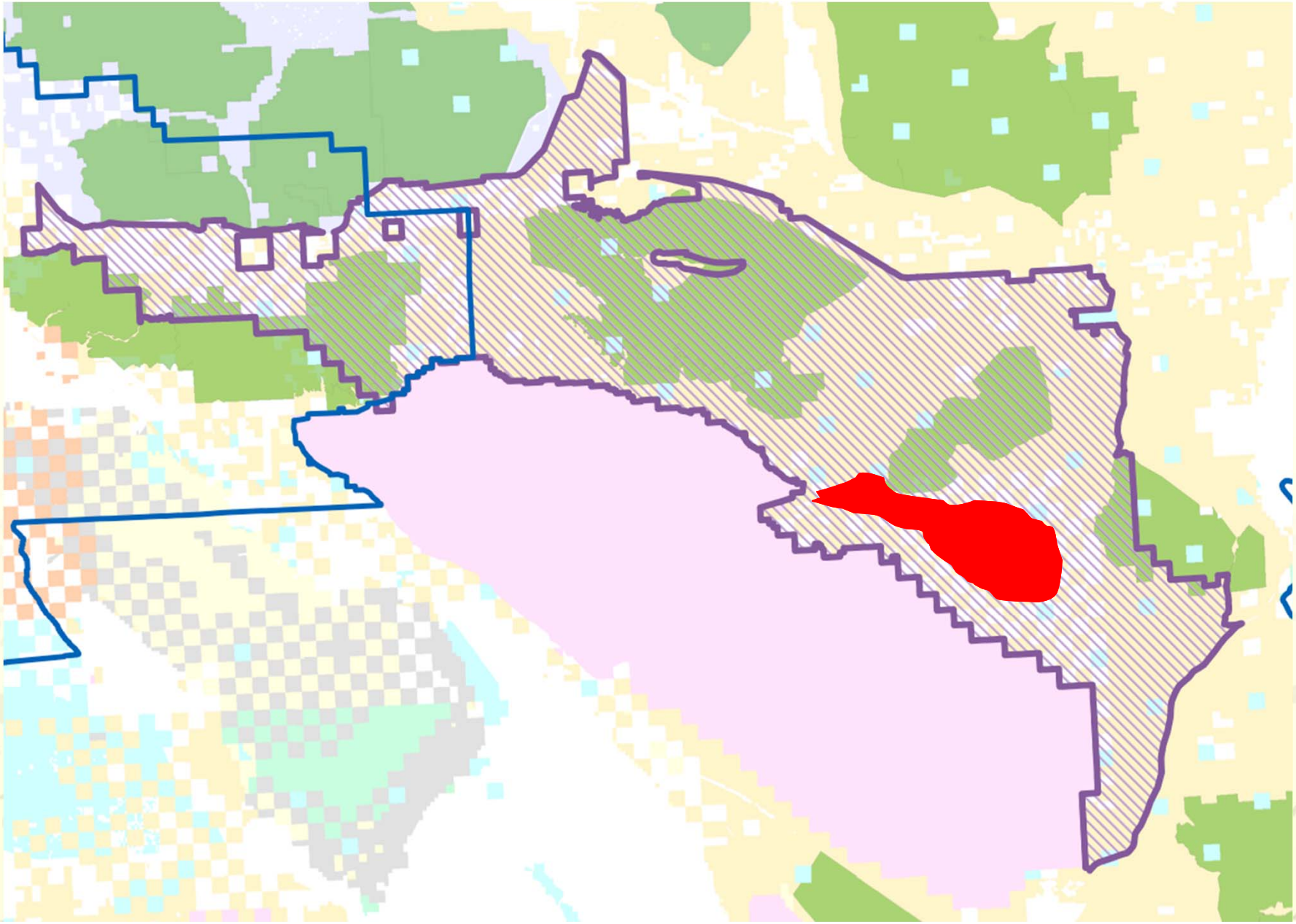
Current BLM Status: Chuckwalla DWMA



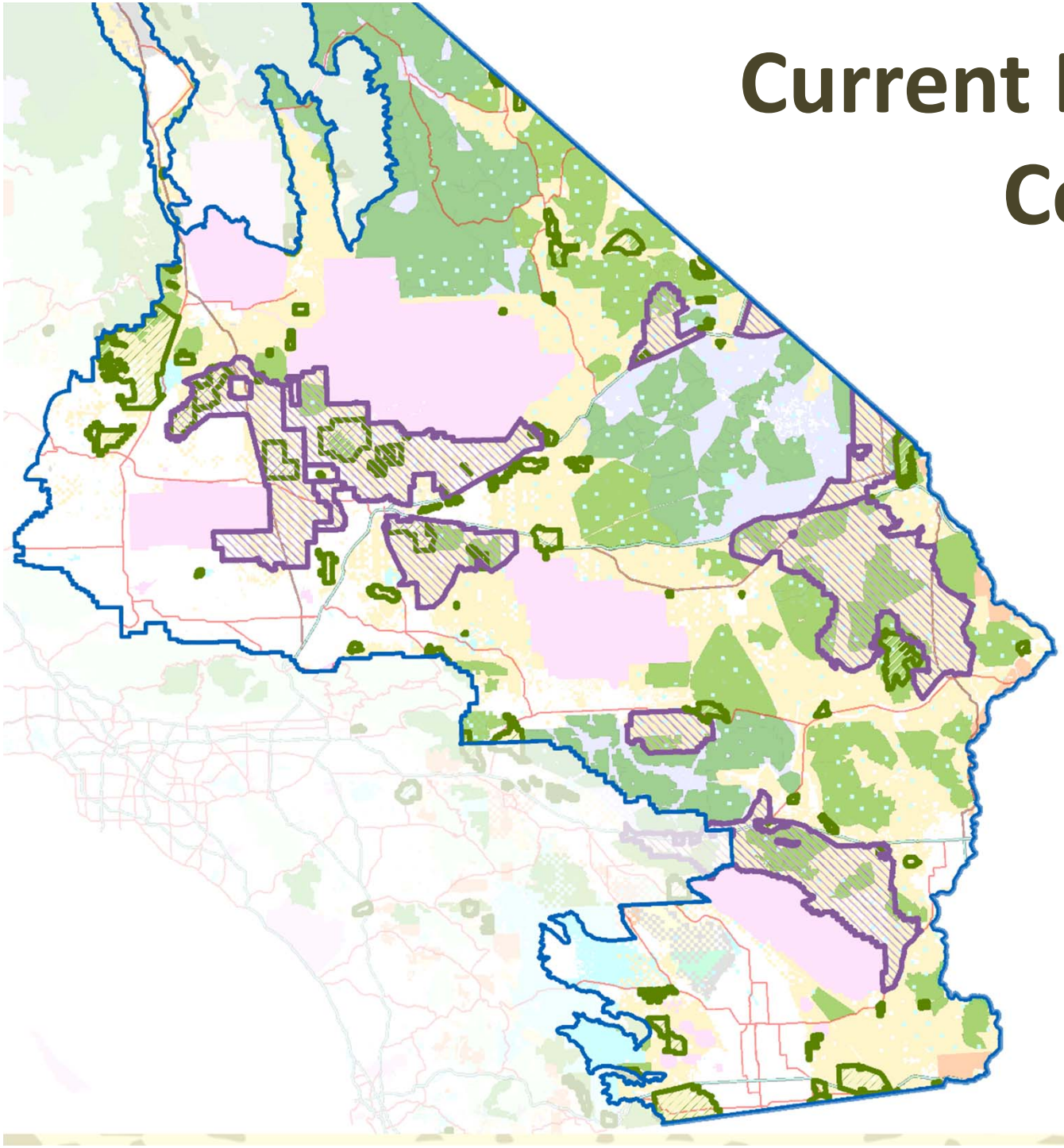
Current BLM Status: Chuckwalla DWMA



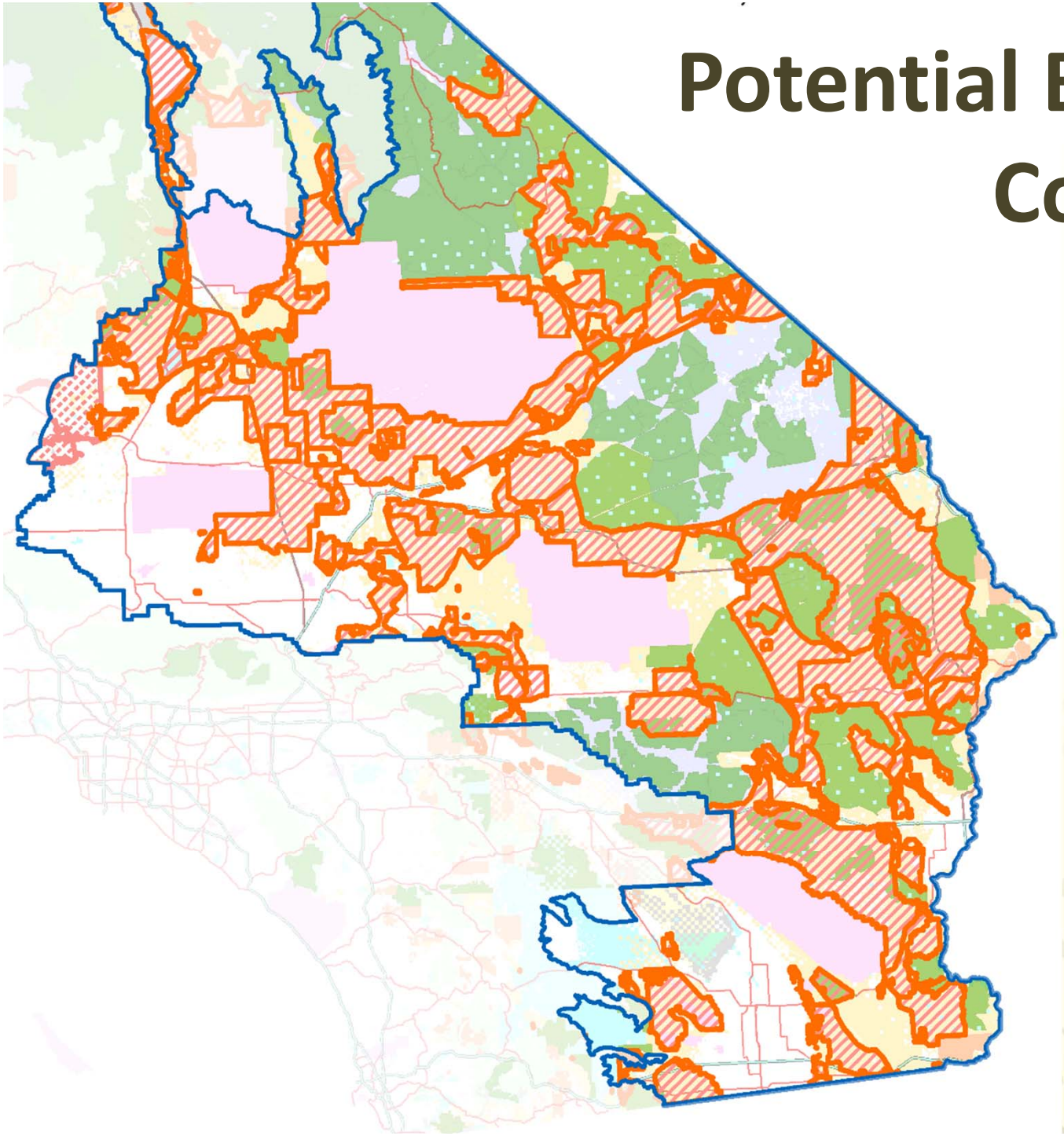
Current BLM Status: Chuckwalla DWMA



Current BLM Status: Conservation Lands



Potential BLM Status: Conservation Lands



Process: What to Expect

- The public draft will present a range of alternatives for public review
- Draft plan will be released in late spring 2014
- 90 day comment period
- Expect FEIS Preferred Alt to be a “Frankenstein”
- Data Basin “DRECP Gateway” available to facilitate public and stakeholder understanding of the draft plan

Final Thoughts

- "Attacked" the conservation land design from several angles, using several methods, came up with essentially the same results
- Definition of DFAs has been an iterative process
- Engage! Review and provide comments!
- Don't "freak out"
- Please give me comments that are *substantive* and are not easy for the agencies to "ignore"

Want More Information

DESERT RENEWABLE ENERGY CONSERVATION PLAN

- **www.drecp.org**
- **databasin.org/galleries**

BLM Land Use Plans: www.blm.gov/ca

Endangered Species Act: www.fws.gov/endangered

CEC: www.energy.ca.gov/33by2020

Natural Communities Conservation Planning: www.dfg.ca.gov/nccp

CBI: www.consbio.org