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NEARBY LUCERNE VALLEY SOLAR PROJECT TO COVER 516 ACRES

A new solar field in nearby Lucerne Valley will cover 516 acres with solar panels. In this feature story, Z107-7 Managing Editor Karl Gardner says the project tries to balance the need for power with environmental concerns...

California's recent heat wave reminds many of the power of the sun. Conservationists say a planned solar project in the Mojave Desert promises to harness that power in a way that protects wildlife and plants. Kim Delfino with Defenders of Wildlife says the Lucerne Valley Solar Project is "smart from the start. "They've placed it on lands that have lower biological values. It's in Lucerne Valley and therefore it's close to the load source that they need for the energy and it's near existing transmission lines." Delfino says as the state moves forward with the development of more solar plants it's vital that the fragile desert landscape and dwindling water supplies be protected. She says once a desert is degraded, it takes millions of years to regenerate. The Lucerne Valley project recently cleared its final environmental review. The 516-acre solar energy power plant is expected to break ground later this year and begin providing power to almost 20-thousand California homes in 2011. Delfino says its' important that solar plants are developed in a sustainable way and that past mistakes from oil drilling and mining are not repeated. "Instead of just allowing projects to sort of pop up wherever the developers happen to put them, we really need to be taking a proactive approach – planning where development should be occurring, identifying those low-value degraded lands and directing the development there."