Site selection for desert wind and solar farms based on heterogeneous sand flux

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#### **Abstract**

Site selection is a priority for building wind and solar farms in deserts, which has to consider the dune threats associated with sand flux, such as dust contamination and sand burial. Thus, understanding changes in sand flux can optimize the site selection for wind and solar farms in deserts. Here, we use the ERA5-Land hourly wind data with  $0.1^{\circ}$  × 0.1° resolution to calculate the yearly sand flux for the period 1950–2021, and adopt the mean of sand flux to score the suitability of global deserts for wind and solar farms. We find that global deserts are dominated by low flux potential ( $\leq 20$  m<sup>2</sup>  $yr^{-1}$ ) and resultant flux potential ( $\leq$ 1.0 m<sup>2</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>) over the past 72 years, and the scoring result indicates that most deserts have low suitability for building wind farms, and high suitability for building solar farms. Our study optimizes the site selection for wind and solar farms in deserts, and contributes to achieving the affordable and clean energy target by 2030 under the framework of the United Nations sustainability development goals.

#### **INTRODUCTION**

Increasing the share of renewable energy is essential to realize the global emission reduction targets<sup> $1, 2$ </sup>. According to the current global emission reduction trends, it is difficult to achieve the global 1.5°C/2°C temperature increase goals and 2050/2070 net-zero emission targets $3-5$ . To reduce anthropogenic carbon dioxide emissions, the exploration of renewable energy at a global scale need be strengthened<sup>1, 6, 7</sup>. In recent years, wind and solar energy, as affordable and clean energy, has been increasingly utilized<sup>8</sup>. A large number of wind and solar farms have been built across the globe<sup>9</sup>. Deserts with low land value, intermittently high wind speed and long sunshine time are favorable locations for building wind and solar farms<sup>10, 11</sup>. In turn, wind and solar farms can increase surface friction, reduce surface albedo, enhance local precipitation in deserts, and flourish regional vegetation around deserts<sup>10</sup>. Hence, desert wind and solar geoengineering should be considered one of the feasible action programs of planetary geoengineering<sup>12, 13</sup> aiming at mitigating anthropogenic greenhouse gas emissions. For building wind and solar farms in deserts, the existing site suitability methodologies<sup> $14-16$ </sup> do not effectively solve the dune threats (e.g. dust contamination and sand burial) to wind and solar generation infrastructure across global deserts.

Dune threats are associated with sand flux, and sand flux driven by effective friction velocities reflects the potential sediment transport capacity of the wind $17-24$ . Similar to the drift potential and resultant drift potential of sand drift $2^{5, 26}$ , the absolute potential sand flux and resultant potential sand flux<sup>18-20</sup>, sand flux in this study can be briefly quantified through the flux potential (FP) and resultant flux potential (RFP). The FP is the sum of volume fluxes in all azimuths, and RFP is calculated by the Euclidean formula of the projected due-north and due-east volume flux components from all azimuths (METHODS). Note that the flux calculation here is for the saturated flux, and the true flux may be smaller (due to precipitation or erodible surface fraction) or larger (due to dune steepness), but this is a reasonable estimate with precedents in

other studies<sup>18-21</sup>. The FP and RFP of sand flux have been used to quantify dune activities<sup>18-21</sup>. Theoretically, the FP represents wind energy, so higher FP brings severer sandblasting<sup>27, 28</sup>, produces more dusts and causes severer sand burial<sup>25, 26</sup>; RFP represents the net sand transport potential in the resultant flux direction, so higher RFP means larger possibilities of sand burial; FP is more important than RFP in assessing the dune threats. Most studies of sand flux are based on the wind data from local meteorological stations<sup>29</sup>. The number of global meteorological stations is limited in desert environments. Wind data from the reanalysis products with different spatiotemporal resolutions provide a feasible scheme for quantifying sand flux at a global scale<sup>18-21</sup>. For example, the ERA5 reanalysis product  $(0.25\degree \times 0.25\degree$  resolution)<sup>30</sup> was used to calculate the FP and RFP of sand  $flux^{18-20}$ . Accordingly, the hourly wind data from the ERA5-Land reanalysis product with higher resolution  $(0.1\degree\times0.1\degree)^{31}$ should be able to adequately capture more spatiotemporal details of changes in sand  $flux<sup>21</sup>$ , and then assess the dune threats to wind and solar farms in deserts. However, how to use the FP and RFP to effectively optimize the site selection for wind and solar farms across global deserts remains unsolved.

In this study, we use the eastward and northward wind components at the height of 10 m from the ERA5-Land hourly wind data to calculate the yearly sand flux for the period 1950–2021, and adopt the 72-yr mean of sand flux to assess the suitability of global deserts for building wind and solar farms. According to wind and solar farm scores, we can reduce or avoid the dune threats, and efficiently implement wind and solar farms in deserts.

### **Results**

#### **72-yr mean of sand flux**

The resampled global deserts with  $0.1^{\circ} \times 0.1^{\circ}$  resolution were distributed in 55 countries, including 24 countries in Asia, 21 countries in Africa, 5 countries in South America, 2 countries in North America, 2 countries in Europe and 1 country in Australasia (Fig. 1).

After calculating the yearly FP on the basis of the ERA5-Land hourly wind data (METHODS), we find that during 1950–2021, the FP mean of global deserts was 9.5 $\pm$ 2.0 m<sup>2</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup> (mean  $\pm$  standard deviation). Across global deserts, the FP mean and standard deviation were as high as  $180.0 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^1$  and  $16.9 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^1$ , respectively. The FP means of global deserts had patch distributions. In terms of the ERA5-Land grid cell number, the FP means of  $0-10 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^{-1}$  were dominant, and followed by the patches of 10–20  $m^2$  yr<sup>-1</sup>. The FP means greater than 20  $m^2$  yr<sup>-1</sup> were mainly observed in northern Somalia, middle and northwest Chad, southern Tunisia, middle Algeria, northern and western Western Sahara, middle and northwest Mauritania, southwest Morocco of Africa; in northern and western China, southern Mongolia, southern and southwest Kazakhstan, western Afghanistan, eastern Iran and southeast Oman of Asia; in middle United States of North America; in southern Argentina of South America

and in southern and western Australia (Fig. 2a).

The RFP mean of global deserts was  $0.4 \pm 0.2$  m<sup>2</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>, and the maximum mean and standard deviation of RFP were 7.6  $m^2 yr^{-1}$  and 3.1  $m^2 yr^{-1}$ , respectively. The RFP means of global deserts also had obvious patch distributions. The RFP means of most deserts were dominated by the patches of  $0-0.5$  m<sup>2</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>, and then the patches of 0.5–  $1.0 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^1$ . The patches with the RFP mean greater than  $1.0 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^1$  were most observed in northern Somalia, middle and northwest Chad, northern and western Western Sahara, northwest Mauritania and southwest Morocco of Africa; in northern and western China, southern Mongolia, western Afghanistan, eastern Iran and southeast Oman of Asia (Fig. 2b). The patches with high RFP mean may have high dune celerities<sup>32</sup>. For the spatial distributions of the FP and RFP standard deviations, see Fig. S1.

#### **Scoring scheme for desert wind and solar farms**

We classified the 72-yr mean of sand flux to construct a scoring scheme. First, the FP means were used to distinguish the dust contamination and sand burial, and the RFP means were used to quantify the sand burial. Then, we intersected the above two mean classifications, removed the non-observed intersections and scored the suitability according to the established rules, in which we assumed that FP mean is more important than RFP mean in scoring the suitability of wind and solar farms (METHODS).

More specifically, the first step of our scoring scheme is to divide the FP means into 18 classifications with the spacing of 10  $m^2 yr^{-1}$ . The grid cell numbers of these classifications and the corresponding percentages accounting for the global desert grid cell number (174884) from low to high were 113077, 64.66%; 47283, 27.04%, 9480, 5.42%; 2493, 1.43%; 858, 0.49%; 548, 0.31%; 433, 0.25%; 262, 0.15%; 229, 0.13%; 97, 0.06%; 41, 0.02%; 33, 0.02%; 15, 0.01%; 11, 0.1%; 6, 0.00%; 8, 0.00%; 4, 0.00% and 6, 0.00%, respectively (Fig.  $3a$ ). The second step is to divide the RFP means into 8 classifications with the spacing of 1.0  $m<sup>2</sup>$  yr<sup>-1</sup>. Similarly, the numbers and percentages of these classifications from low to high were 170939, 97.74%; 3268, 1.87%; 408, 0.23%; 144, 0.08%; 82, 0.05%; 29, 0.02%; 9, 0.01% and 5, 0.00%; respectively (Fig. 3b). These statistics showed that global deserts are dominated by low FP ( $\leq$ 20 m<sup>2</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>) and RFP ( $\leq$ 1.0 m<sup>2</sup> yr<sup>-1</sup>). The final step is to intersect the classifications of FP and RFP means. We removed the non-observed intersections and got the scores of wind and solar farms according to the established rules (Table S1 and Table S3, more details see METHODS). The ascending FP mean classifications are favorable for wind farms, but not for solar farms. The ascending RFP mean classifications are more unfavorable for solar farms than wind farms.

We find that wind and solar farm scores across global deserts had the differentiated spatial distributions due to different FP and RFP mean classifications. The maximum scoring frequencies for wind farms (Fig. 3c inset) and solar farms (Fig. 3d inset)

(64.66%) were the same, but their scores were 2 and 80, respectively. The frequencies of score 1–4 (64.72%), 5–8 (27.26%), 9–12 (5.2%) for wind farms were greater than 5% (Fig. 3c), and those of score 77–80 (91.69%), 73–76 (5.42%) for solar farms were greater than 5% (Fig. 3d). If only consider the dune threats, wind farms had more low scores (i.e. low suitability), and solar farms had more high scores (i.e. high suitability); and the scoring frequency distributions of global deserts presented the similar situation (Fig.  $3c$  inset and Fig.  $3d$  inset). However, in the deserts with high FP mean, such as in northern Somalia, middle Chad and western Western Sahara, western Afghanistan and northern China, wind farms (Fig. 3c) had higher scores than solar farms (Fig. 3d). In conclusion, the criteria of site selection for wind and solar farms varied across the globe.

#### **DISCUSSION**

Our results first demonstrate heterogeneous spatial distributions of sand flux and classifications of global deserts in terms of wind environments, and present a scoring scheme for the site selection of wind and solar farms across global deserts on the basis of the 72-yr mean of sand flux, which can reflect the basic characteristics of sand flux. In this study, we assumed that FP mean is more important than RFP mean in evaluating the threats to wind and solar generation infrastructure. Higher FP brings severer sandblasting<sup>27, 28</sup>, produces more dust and causes severer sand burial to low solar photovoltaic panel; higher RFP causes severer sand burial to low solar photovoltaic panel than high and large wind turbine<sup>8</sup> in the resultant flux direction. In addition, we adopt the equidistant spacings of 10  $m^2$  yr<sup>-1</sup> and 1  $m^2$  yr<sup>-1</sup> in FP and RFP mean classifications to ensure the rationality of scoring scheme. Furthermore, we find that  $82\%$  of the existing solar farm sites<sup>33</sup> in deserts are located in the highest-score regions of solar farms (Fig. S2).

This study provides a guide to select the regions in deserts suitable for wind farms or solar farms. The expanding use of wind data from the reanalysis products with different spatiotemporal resolutions<sup>18-21</sup>, especially, the ERA5-Land reanalysis product  $(0.1^{\circ}\times0.1^{\circ}$  and hourly resolution)<sup>21</sup>, could better characterize the wind environments and quantify the dune threats at a global scale. Some deserts have no effective friction velocities and small or zero flux<sup>18-20, 26</sup>. They may be interpreted as the ancient dune systems or be driven by other episodic factors (e.g. alluvial/fluvial, lacustrine and coastal). But this study only focuses on the potential sediment transport capacity determined by effective friction velocities<sup>17-24</sup>. In the actual site selection, local situations such as sediment availability<sup>32</sup>, topographic influences<sup>35, 36</sup> and precipitation effect<sup>19, 37</sup> should also be considered.

Our scoring scheme could be used to choose the best sites for wind and solar farms in the regions affected by dune threats, and to help assess the site suitability of traffic engineering, petroleum exploitation and irrigated farming in desert environments. Expectantly, our results can help build desert wind and solar geoengineering and

achieve the Sustainable Development Goal 7 ("affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all") by  $2030^{38}$ , and even contributes to achieve the global surface temperature goal of  $1.5-2$ °C and reach the global carbon neutrality<sup>39</sup> in a long-term perspective.

#### **METHODS**

#### **Desert data**

Deserts are from the global and regional desert area, which was extracted by support vector machine analysis, trial-and-error method and visual interpretation analyses based on the Moderate Resolution Imaging Spectroradiometer data (500 m resolution)<sup>40</sup>. We resampled the data into grid cells at  $0.1\degree \times 0.1\degree$  resolution, same to the spatial resolution of the ERA5-Land reanalysis product from the European Center for Medium Range Weather Forecasts<sup>31</sup>. Furthermore, we used the 72-yr FP mean to constrain global deserts. The total number of grid cells for global dunes was 174884.

#### **Wind data**

Wind data are from the eastward and northward wind components at the height of 10 m of the ERA5-Land reanalysis product, which has the hourly temporal resolution and  $0.1^{\circ} \times 0.1^{\circ}$  spatial resolution<sup>31</sup>. In this study, the ERA5-Land hourly wind data spanned from 1950 to 2021. The instantaneous wind speed U and azimuth A at the height of 10 m is calculated as

$$
U = \sqrt[2]{u^2 + v^2} \tag{1}
$$

$$
A = \text{atan2}(u, v) \tag{2}
$$

where u is the eastward component, in m s<sup>-1</sup>; and v is the northward component, in  $m s^{-1}$ .

#### **Conceptual framework of sand flux**

The friction velocity  $u_{fv}$  in m s<sup>-1</sup> is calculated as

$$
u_{fv} = \frac{U\kappa}{\ln(z/z_0)}\tag{3}
$$

where U is the instantaneous wind speed at the height of 10 m,  $\kappa = 0.4$  is Von Kármán constant,  $z = 10$  m is the height above the Earth surface,  $z_0 = 0.001$  m is the assumed roughness length above the sand surface $41$ .

The threshold friction velocity  $u_{ttv} = 0.277$  m s<sup>-1</sup> is calculated by

$$
u_{tfv} = \frac{\sqrt[2]{gd\rho_s/\rho_f}}{10} \tag{4}
$$

where  $g = 9.81 \text{ m}^2 \text{ s}^{-1}$  is gravity acceleration;  $d = 0.00036 \text{ m}$  is the mean of median grain diameters for surface samples in the study of Martin and Kok  $(0.53\pm0.04$  mm,  $0.53\pm0.03$  mm and  $0.40\pm0.07$  mm)<sup>23</sup>, Greeley et al.  $(0.23$  mm)<sup>42</sup>, Namikas (0.25)  $\text{mm}$ <sup>43</sup> and Chinese deserts (the mean of median grain diameters of 426 dune samples is 0.23 $\pm$ 0.06 mm) in this study (Table S4);  $\rho_s = 2650 \text{ kg m}^{-3}$  is sand density;  $\rho_f =$ 1.22 kg m<sup>-3</sup> is air density<sup>23</sup>.

The saturated mass flux  $\overrightarrow{q_m}$  in kg m<sup>-1</sup> s<sup>-1</sup> is approximately<sup>22-24</sup>

$$
\overrightarrow{q_m} = C \frac{u_{tfv}}{g} \rho_f \left( u_{efv}^2 - u_{tfv}^2 \right) \tag{5}
$$

where  $C = 5$  is an empirical (dimensionless) scaling parameter,  $u_{e f v} > u_{t f v}$  is effective friction velocity. Divided by sand density  $\rho_s$ , the mass flux measured in kg  $m^{-1}$  s<sup>-1</sup> is converted to volume flux measured in  $m^2$  s<sup>-1</sup>, so the volume flux  $\overrightarrow{q_v}$  is defined as

$$
\overrightarrow{q_v} = C \frac{u_{tfv}}{g\rho_s} \rho_f \left( u_{efv}^2 - u_{tfv}^2 \right) \tag{6}
$$

After deriving instantaneous effective friction velocity, and considering the intermittence of winds, we also define  $\overrightarrow{q_v} = 0$  when  $u_{fv} \leq u_{trv}$ , and finally apply zero flux to the mean of the subsequent flux calculations, so the flux potential (FP) measured in  $m^2$  yr<sup>-1</sup> is given by

$$
FP = S \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} |\overrightarrow{q_v}|}{N}
$$
 (7)

where FP reflects the potential sediment transport capacity of effective friction velocities,  $S = 31536000$  is the number of seconds of 365 days, N is the number of hours of Julian years (8760 hours for common year or 8784 hours for leap year) for the period 1950–2021.

The obtained  $\overrightarrow{q_b}$  in all azimuths (A) from the 10 m instantaneous effective friction velocities are projected to the due-east and due-north directions to solve the resultant flux potential (RFP) measured in  $m^2 yr^{-1}$ ,

$$
RFP_E = S \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} \overrightarrow{q_v} \sin A}{N}
$$
 (8)

$$
RFP_N = S \frac{\sum_{i=1}^{N} \overrightarrow{q_v} \cos A}{N}
$$
 (9)

$$
RFP = \sqrt[2]{RFP_E^2 + RFP_N^2}
$$
 (10)

where RFP is the Euclidean sum of the projected due-east and due-north volume flux

components (RFP\_E and RFP\_N). It represents the net sand transport potential in the resultant flux direction, which is the net trend of sand flux, in line with the dominant direction of dune celerities. We used the absolute RFP, neglecting its vector property.

Note that we assumed that global deserts are covered by unvegetated dunes in this study. In addition, the naming directions of FP and RFP follows where the sand moves. Eventually, the ERA5-Land grid cells in deserts pile up sand measured by RFP under effective friction velocities.

### **Calculating the 72-year mean of sand flux**

We estimated the spatial distributions of FP mean and RFP mean across global dunes. Considering the uncertainty of wind speed from the ERA5-Land hourly wind data<sup>31</sup>, we extracted the spatial distributions of the standard deviations of the FP and RFP means during the study period (Fig. S1).

### **Area-weighted aggregated statistics**

The means  $\pm$  standard deviations of FP and RFP for global deserts were weighted by the grid cell area at a global scale, employing the CDO software $44$ .

### **Score criteria of wind and solar farms**

According to the existing conceptual framework of sand flux<sup>18-21</sup>, the FP and RFP means are divided into 18 and 8 classifications with the spacings of 10  $m^2$  yr<sup>-1</sup> and 1.0  $m<sup>2</sup>$  yr<sup>-1</sup>, respectively. For wind and solar farms, the FP reflects wind energy, as well as the dust contamination and sand burial degrees on solar photovoltaic panel. Compared with high and large wind turbine<sup>8</sup>, effective friction velocities drive dune movement, bring the sandblasting<sup>27, 28</sup>, produce dusts that cover the solar panel surface, reducing the solar photovoltaic conversion efficiency<sup>45</sup>, and cause severer sand burial to low solar photovoltaic panel. The RFP reflects the sand burial degree of solar photovoltaic panel and wind turbine in the resultant flux direction.

Thus, we proposed some simple criteria to score the suitability based on empirical judgment: First, high FP mean is favorable for wind farms. Second, high RFP mean would cause severer sand burial to solar generation infrastructure than wind generation infrastructure.

We assumed that FP mean is more important than RFP mean in scoring the suitability of wind and solar farms. On the basis of the aforementioned empirical judgment, we illustrated the detailed rules used for scoring the suitability of geometric intersections between classifications of FP mean and RFP mean:

### **Wind farms**

For wind farms, we tabulated wind farm score according to the importance of

empirical judgment about wind farms. The combination number of the FP and RFP mean classifications in sand flux was 144 (18×8).

The scoring scheme for wind farms included the following steps:

Step 1: Sort FP mean classification from low to high in the first column.

Step 2: In the second column, we sequentially nested RFP mean classification from high to low under individual classifications of FP mean (from low to high).

Step 3: Considering the empirical judgment about wind farms, we assigned the score from 1 to 144. However, only 80 combinations were observed at a global scale. The other 64 combinations did not exist, and their combinations, see Table S2. We removed these 64 combinations and reassigned the final wind farm score from 1 to 80 (Table S1).

## **Solar farms**

For solar farms, we tabulated solar farm score by the importance of empirical judgment about solar farms (Table S3). The combination number of the FP and RFP mean classifications in sand flux was still 144 (18×8).

The scoring scheme for solar farms included the following steps:

Step 1: Sort FP mean classification in the first column from high to low.

Step 2: In the second column, we still sequentially nested RFP mean classification from high to low under individual classifications of FP mean (from low to high).

Step 3: Considering the empirical judgment about solar farms, we assigned the score from 1 to 144. However, only 80 combinations were observed at a global scale. The other 64 combinations did not exist, and their combinations, see Table S2. We removed these 64 combinations and reassigned the final solar farm score from 1 to 80 (Table S3).

### **Validation of the scoring scheme for solar farms in dune fields**

The locations of solar farms used for the validation are from the global, open-access, harmonized spatial datasets based on the OpenStreetMap infrastructure data $^{33,46}$ . We used the desert data to mask the point vector data titled by the global solar 2020, and identified the actual locations of solar installations in deserts (Fig. S2), in order to validate the robustness of our scoring scheme for solar farms in deserts.

# **DATA AVAILABILITY**

The dataset generated in this study are publicly available via the National Tibetan Plateau/Third Pole Environment Data Center (https://doi.org/10.11888/Terre.tpdc.272808).

## **CODE AVAILABILITY**

Codes for calculating the yearly sand flux based on the ERA5-Land hourly wind data are available at https://github.com/liguoshuai-desert/wind-flux. Data analysis is finished by the CDO, Python, ArcGIS 10.6 and OriginPro Learning Edition software.

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## **AUTHOR CONTRIBUTIONS**

G.L., L.T., B.Y. and X.L. designed research; G.L. and B.Y. performed research and analyzed data; G.L., L.T., T.C., Y.L., H.D., H.Z., Y.Z., C.H., R.J. and X.L. contributed analytic tools; G.L., L.T., B.Y., G.F., F.C.L., N.H., W.T. and X.L. wrote the paper.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

The authors declare no competing interest.

# **ADDITIONAL INFORMATION**

Supplementary Fig. S1–S2. Supplementary Table S1–S4.

# **FIGURES**



## **Fig. 1 Spatial distribution of global deserts.**

Deserts are resampled to a resolution of  $0.1^{\circ} \times 0.1^{\circ}$ , matching the spatial resolution of the ERA5-Land hourly wind data. Further, we use the 72-yr FP mean to constrain global deserts. The colored abbreviations are the three letter ISO 3166-1 alpha-3 GADM country codes. The countries in Asia are colored by the malachite green, the countries in Africa the mars red, the countries in South America the ginger pink, the countries in North America the moorea blue, the countries in Europe the cretan blue,

and the countries in Australasia the anemone violet. The boundaries of the country with desert data are colored by 50% gray, and the rest are colored by 10% gray.



**Fig. 2 The (a) FP and (b) RFP means of global deserts for the period 1950–2021.**  The spacing of RFP mean is set to  $0.5 \text{ m}^2 \text{ yr}^1$ .



# **Fig. 3 The scoring scheme and result for wind and solar farms based on changes in sand flux.**

First intersect the (**a**) FP and (**b**) RFP mean classifications, then remove non-observed combinations, and finally apply the established rules to assign the corresponding scores for wind farms (**c**) and solar farms (**d**). The bottom left insets show frequency distributions of wind and solar farm scores.

## **Supplementary Information**

Site selection for desert wind and solar farms based on heterogeneous sand flux

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### **Supplementary Figures**



Fig. S1 Spatial distributions of the standard deviations of the (a) FP and (b) RFP for the period 1950–2021.

(a) and (b) adopt the interval size of 1  $m^2 yr^{-1}$  and 0.2  $m^2 yr^{-1}$ , respectively. The boundaries of the country with desert data are colored by 50% gray, and the rest are colored by 10% gray.



Fig. S2 Validation of solar farm score in deserts.

The black solid squares represent the locations of the 734 solar installations in deserts. The inset presents the scoring frequencies extracted by the existing solar farms in

deserts, with score 52, accounting for 0.14% of the total; 59, 0.14%; 60, 0.14%; 70, 0.41%; 71, 0.54%; 75, 1.36%; 78, 15.26% and 80, 82.02%.

# **Supplementary Tables**

Table S1. Wind farm score across global deserts.

FP mean is classified into 18 categories, and RFP mean is classified into 8 categories. High (low) score represents that wind farms have a strong (weak) suitability, but for building a real wind farm, we should choose the appropriate scores combined with other factors.





FP mean	<b>RFP</b> mean
$\mathbf{1}$	8
$\mathbf{1}$	$\overline{7}$
$\mathbf{1}$	6
$\mathbf{1}$	
$\mathbf{1}$	$\begin{array}{c} 5 \\ 4 \\ 3 \\ 8 \end{array}$
$\mathbf{1}$	
	$\overline{7}$
2 2 2 2 3 3 3	6
	5
	$\begin{array}{c} 4 \\ 8 \\ 7 \end{array}$
$\overline{\mathbf{3}}$	6
$\overline{\mathbf{3}}$	$\frac{5}{8}$
$\overline{\mathcal{A}}$	
$\overline{\mathcal{L}}$	$\overline{7}$
$\overline{\mathcal{L}}$	6
	8
$\begin{array}{c} 5 \\ 5 \\ 6 \end{array}$	$\overline{7}$
	8
$\overline{7}$	8
9	$\mathbf{1}$
10	$\overline{7}$
10	$\mathbf{1}$
<sup>1</sup>	8
<sup>1</sup>	$\overline{7}$
11	$\mathbf{1}$
12	8
12	7
12	6
12	$\mathbf{1}$
13	8
13	7
13	6
13	$\mathbf{1}$
14 14	8 $\overline{7}$
14 14	6
14	3 $\mathbf{1}$

Table S2. The removed 64 combinations in Step 3 of wind farms and solar farms in METHODS.



Table S3. Solar farm score across global dunes.







Table S4. The median grain diameters of dune samples in Chinese deserts.

In this study, Chinese desert with dune samples were the Taklamakan Desert (TakD),

Gurban Tunggut Desert (GTD), Qaidam Desert (QaiD), Kumtag Desert (KumD), Badain Jaran Desert (BJD), Tengger Desert (TenD), Hobq Desert (HobD), Mu Us Sandy land (MUS), Hunshandake Sandy land (HunS), Hunlunbuir Sandy land (HulS) and Horqin Sandy land (HorS). The full names and corresponding abbreviations of Chinese deserts were referred to Li, G. et al.<sup>35</sup>. Particle size analysis of all sand samples were done with the Malvern laser granulometer (Malvern Mastersizer 3000). Dune samples above 10 cm depth in each desert in different sampling years were collected to analyze the median grain diameter  $(d_{50})$ .



















