

Route not only problem with SunZia

By Norm "Mick" Meader / Co-Chair, Cascabel Working Group

I am responding to Tom Wray's May 5 op-ed on the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, "Time to move ahead on green power line." It's time to be honest with New Mexico's people about this project so they know what they're getting.

First, is SunZia "green?" The SouthWestern Power Group initially proposed SunZia primarily to deliver power from its not-yet-built natural gas power plant in Bowie, Arizona. If this 1,000-megawatt plant is built, SunZia will be used with it.

There's nothing wrong with this, but let's be honest about what we're doing: Natural gas isn't green.

What about those 24,000 jobs? How many will New Mexico get? Building SunZia's two lines and substations will require 500 to 600 workers. Of those, about 20 percent will be hired in New Mexico, or 100 to 120 people.

New Mexico won't make those steel towers or transmission cables, so no jobs there.

You will need to feed and house those workers, though, and they'll spend wages on goods and services. That'll create another 300 jobs at the Country Kitchen, Motel 6, Wal-Mart, Target, etc.

And how many renewable energy jobs are there for you?

For its modeling, New Mexico State University assumed these facilities would use 2,420 megawatts of SunZia's capacity and then calculated the number of workers needed to build them. NMSU didn't say whether or when these facilities might be built. If they are, this would create 1,600 to 1,700 construction jobs for New Mexico.

You won't be making those solar panels or wind turbines, so no jobs there, but worker spending could create another 2,000 to 3,000 jobs for you.

Will these occur in the next four years? Nope. They'll happen over the next 20-30 years, if all of those facilities are ever built.

Can you sell your power? There's no real market for it in Arizona – too much solar here, a tiny renewable portfolio standard to meet and big plans for energy exports. What about California? Only Southern California Edison and Pacific Gas and Electric can buy enough to make this work for you.

Will they? California developers have already proposed building twice the amount of generation needed to meet the state's 2020 33 percent renewable energy requirement. By the time New Mexico enters the market, California will be getting 25 percent to 30 percent of its power from renewables. It's going to be tight for you.

Can you get your power to California? SunZia is the only proposed western transmission project aimed at California that doesn't directly deliver its power there, and that hurts. Instead, SunZia dumps its power in east-central Arizona and then forces California utilities to buy up transmission capacity in central and western Arizona to gain access to it.

While this is legal, it would rob Arizona ratepayers of \$400 million of new in-state capacity that was built for their own use. A big fight could be brewing here.

Lastly, SunZia would seriously damage high-quality environmental resources in southeastern Arizona. To be

completed, this project must either permanently scar a prime roadless area between the Aravaipa Canyon and Galiuro Mountains Wildernesses or follow the highly prized and environmentally sensitive San Pedro River Valley for 45 miles.

Arizona's environmentalists initially supported SunZia. Once they saw its impacts, however, their opposition was unanimous. They'll fight this every way they can now.

If you build this project, it will sit idle until power generation is brought on line, regardless of whether the power is from "green" or conventional sources. It will take decades, not years to reach its full value and usefulness.

This may be much longer than most investors are willing to wait for a return on their investment.

The Cascabel Working Group is located on the San Pedro River in southeastern Arizona and works to protect the valley's environment and traditional land uses.

:Suggested Reading

- [BLM Seeking Comment on SunZia Project](#)
 - [Benefits seem overstated for SunZia project](#)
 - [Army: SunZia line proposal a threat to national security](#)
 - [BLM Power Line Study Released](#)
 - [Time to move ahead on green power line](#)
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