



COUNTY ADMINISTRATOR'S OFFICE

PIMA COUNTY GOVERNMENTAL CENTER
130 W. CONGRESS, TUCSON, AZ 85701-1317
(520) 740-8661 FAX (520) 740-8171

C.H. HUCKELBERRY
County Administrator

June 7, 2010

Adrian Garcia, Project Manager
Bureau of Land Management
P. O. Box 27115
Santa Fe, New Mexico 87502-0115

Re: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project - Scoping Comments on Proposed Routes and Expansion of Study Area

Dear Mr. Garcia:

This letter is part of Pima County's continued comments during the scoping period for the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project. On April 2, 2010, County staff met with you and representatives of SunZia Southwest Transmission and EPG to discuss the proposed expansion of the SunZia Project study area and proposed routes in Pima County. The County not only continues to be concerned over the potential adverse impacts associated with the proposed alternative routes as currently depicted on the May 2010 SunZia Project Features map, but also the overall purpose and need for this project.

Again, we encourage the project evaluation team to gain a better understanding of the Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan (SDCP) and how the project routes would conflict with the goals and successes of the SDCP. A number of problems with routes proposed would have been clear had more consideration been given to the SDCP and all of the social and environmental planning that went into its development.

Project Scope and Need for Programmatic EIS

Because of the extensive nature of this project and the fact that generation of the power and transmission are inexplicitly linked, why is the construction of the power plant near Socorro, New Mexico and other proposed New Mexico locations not a part of the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) process and EIS process? It does not seem reasonable to separate the two when both are required to complete the project, unless this transmission

Mr. Adrian Garcia

Re: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project - Scoping Comments on Proposed Routes
and Expansion of Study Area

June 7, 2010

Page 2 of 8

line is not needed by the plant and alternative delivery routes are possible. This is a circumstance that has not been made clear during the project scoping to date and which should have an impact on any decision to move the project forward based on the significant diversity of concerns raised by so many during the initial scoping process.

While the County applauds efforts that explore and develop renewable energy resources, it is important to also include a comprehensive assessment of where such resources should be appropriately located and where they can be developed with the least social, economic and environmental impacts. Ideally, this assessment would be done nationally, but in looking at it on a statewide or regional level, a comprehensive assessment of energy resources is needed to develop these resources in areas that do not threaten water resources, meet applicable environmental laws and policies, protect capital investments made in local areas for conservation and do not impact wildlife and scenic areas that support eco-based tourism in our local economy.

At the April meeting, there was discussion by proponents on the proposed substations required for the project and the need to reach stranded resources. A project representative clarified that investments have not been made and that there are no existing facilities on the ground or "stranded resources" at this time. The Southwest Area Transmission study (SWAT) was referred to as an impetus for this project. However, the document does not identify the need to tap wind resources from New Mexico to move through Arizona onto California. It states that California needs more renewable energy and power in general and identifies western Arizona and solar as a potential energy source. It was also stated that one motivation for this project was Tucson Electric Power Company's (TEP) renewable energy needs.

The Bureau of Land Management completed a regional assessment of potential renewable energy resource locations and set aside significant acreage in western Arizona for solar energy development. This should be considered as part of a needs assessment for the overall SunZia project. If it is found that energy resources can be generated in Arizona closer to the SunZia delivery destination, then the need for developing transmission lines from New Mexico across Arizona should be re-examined and new alternatives developed for public review prior to going forward with the EIS process.

Locally, Pima County has been cooperating with TEP on specific Tucson area projects that contribute to TEP's renewable energy targets and are on a much faster track toward completion than what is being proposed by SunZia. It makes programmatic sense from a financial and environmental impact standpoint to locate and develop an energy source closer to the target area, as opposed to locating and constructing 500 miles of transmission lines across two vast landscapes to reach an intended target area.

Mr. Adrian Garcia

Re: **SunZia Southwest Transmission Project - Scoping Comments on Proposed Routes and Expansion of Study Area**

June 7, 2010

Page 3 of 8

Considering the above, the County does not feel the SunZia project will significantly advance local efforts in renewable energy or that enough evidence and information has been provided to justify need for the overall project.

Proposed Transmission Line Routes through Eastern Pima County

While we feel this project should not be routed through Pima County given the above, the following comments are in response to your request for comments on the proposed alternative routes. As of the May 2010 maps on the BLM website, there are primarily 3 transmission line corridors in Pima County that are of concern. These routes run through the San Pedro River Valley, the Altar and Avra Valleys, and the Cienega Creek Corridor. Each area has unique characteristics that would be adversely impacted with irreversible consequences.

1. San Pedro Valley Transmission Line Corridor. I have attached my February 17, 2010 letter to you regarding the modified alternative routes and subsequent elimination of the route through the Bingham Cienega Natural Preserve. While elimination of this route is supported, the County expressed continued concerns over the proposed alternative route cutting through County managed State grazing lease lands that are part of the A7 Ranch purchased with voter-approved bond monies. Concerns include the route cutting through important conservation areas, wildlife travel corridors, major A7 Ranch roads and pastures. The County manages the ongoing ranching operations, while conserving and protecting the ecological values of the lands. Please refer to the attached letter for complete comments on this transmission line corridor.
2. Altar Valley, Santa Cruz River Valley and Avra Valley Transmission Line Corridor. The SunZia Southwest Transmission project has identified several alternative routes through Avra Valley, Santa Cruz River Valley and Avra Valley subject to a feasibility study that may impact the County's Tucson Mountain Park and/or the Tucson Mitigation Corridor and significant cultural resources in these areas. Issues of concern regarding Routes F100, F104, F330, F340, F350, F360 and others in this area, as identified on the SunZia May 2010 Arizona Land Use Resources Map are as follows:

Santa Cruz River Valley and Altar Valley Routes

- The Santa Cruz Valley is archaeologically rich, with prehistoric and historic sites densely distributed throughout the valley forming concentrations of sites associated with the river and its major tributaries, including from south to north, Julian Wash, West Branch Santa Cruz, Rillito River, and Canada Del Oro. Some of the larger, extremely significant and vulnerable

Mr. Adrian Garcia

Re: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project - Scoping Comments on Proposed Routes
and Expansion of Study Area

June 7, 2010

Page 4 of 8

prehistoric sites associated with the Santa Cruz River system include, from south to north, Julian Wash, West Branch, Hodges Ruin, Sunset Mesa, Los Morteros, and the Huntington Ruin. For example, the proposed route extending northward along the Santa Cruz River from the Irvington Road Substation potentially crosses numerous prehistoric sites, ranging from very large Hohokam villages, like Valencia Site, West Branch Site, and Julian Wash Site, to sites with important Archaic Period and Early Agricultural Period components, such as the Wetlands, Los Pozos, and Rillito Fan sites.

- Route F290 cuts across State grazing leases that the County manages for conservation as part of the Diamond Bell Ranch purchase. As stated in my letter regarding the San Pedro River Valley proposed route, it is the County's intent to acquire State Trust lands associated with our ranch acquisitions for long-term conservation. A large utility corridor would impact the effectiveness of those lands for conservation. We also have significant concerns that this route would require additional habitat impacts during and after construction that would potentially impact large acreages of endangered Pima Pineapple cactus habitat.
- The northern Altar Valley could be affected by a proposed route that portions of Brawley Wash, which contains rich concentrations of prehistoric and historic sites. Several important concentrations of sites have been identified in the SDCP as Priority Archaeological Site Complexes, including Gunsight PASC, southwest of the San Xavier Reservation lands, and Brawley Batamote PASC to the west-northwest of San Xavier lands. The Cocoraque Butte Complex, which includes important Archaic Period rock art and habitation components, also could be affected.

Avra Valley Routes

- Both Tucson Mountain Park (TMP) and the Tucson Mitigation Corridor (TMC) are part of the Pima County Conservation Lands System. The SDCP identified priority vulnerable species, cultural resources, special management areas and critical linkages that may be impacted by the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project. The project proponents are advised to consider the wealth of information available from the SDCP.
- There are several Pima County Code issues to consider. Sandario, Mile Wide, Kinney, and Gates Pass Roads are designated Major Scenic Routes by the Pima County Zoning Code and have views of the proposed SunZia project. The intent of this designation is to preserve and enhance the visual resources of the natural and built environment. SunZia routes within one mile of TMP are also in the Pima County Buffer Overlay Zone. One purpose

Mr. Adrian Garcia

Re: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project - Scoping Comments on Proposed Routes
and Expansion of Study Area

June 7, 2010

Page 5 of 8

of the Buffer Overlay Zone is to foster wildlife habitat in the vicinity of Pima County's public preserves. Finally, much of the private land adjacent to TMP and the TMC is included in the Resource Transition land use category of the Pima County Comprehensive Plan, and development of such lands are to blend with the natural landscape and support environmentally sensitive linkages.

- In 2008, Pima County completed a Management Plan for TMP that addresses the Tucson Mitigation Corridor; lease properties such as the Arizona-Sonora Desert Museum (ASDM); and visual, biological, and cultural resource management. Management of the Tucson Mitigation Corridor is governed by a cooperative agreement between Pima County, Arizona Game and Fish Department and the Bureau of Reclamation. The Bureau acquired the TMC as partial mitigation for the Central Arizona Project, and in the Bureau's April 26, 2010 correspondence to BLM, they clearly oppose use of the TMC for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project.

According to the TMP Management Plan, 1.4 million people visit the park on an annual basis not including drive through commuters. 870,000, or 62 percent, visit the world renowned ASDM, Gates Pass Overlook and the other park pull outs. ASDM, Gates Pass Overlook and many of the park roads and trails incorporate a view to the west of the same iconic Sonoran Desert landscape proposed for the construction of potentially two 190-foot high, 500kv transmission lines by SunZia. Negative visual impacts associated with this project may result in negative impacts to the multi-million dollar tourist industry of southern Arizona.

- In their April 16, 2010 letter to BLM, Saguaro National Park refers to wildlife habitat loss and fragmentation as one of the reasons they oppose SunZia routes adjacent to Saguaro National Park. Pima County is committed to the expansion of biological connections between TMP and other natural resource areas. A proposed 1,000-foot wide right of way for the SunZia Southwest Transmission project will compromise the intent of the existing TMC biological connection to Saguaro National Park, the Brawley/Black Wash Complex and the mountain ranges of the Ironwood Forest National Monument to the west.
- The Pima County Board of Supervisors adopted resolutions in opposition to similar past projects, notably the 2000 Public Service Company of New Mexico (PNM) Sonora – Arizona Interconnection Project and the 2007 Arizona Department of Transportation Interstate 10 Bypass. In addition, a

Mr. Adrian Garcia

Re: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project - Scoping Comments on Proposed Routes
and Expansion of Study Area

June 7, 2010

Page 6 of 8

2007 TEP utility corridor proposal was opposed by Pima County. Pima County has a strong and consistent track record of opposing utility and transportation corridors that impact, are adjacent to or bisect TMP. Should the SunZia Southwest Transmission project continue proposing the Avra Valley Routes noted above, similar opposition can be anticipated.

3. Cienega Valley Transmission Line Corridor

SunZia Southwest Transmission project has identified several alternate routes through the Cienega Valley subject to feasibility study that may impact Saguaro National Park East, the Coronado National Forest and most directly the County-owned Bar V Ranch and riparian properties including the County's Cienega Creek Natural Preserve, designated an Arizona Heritage Water. Issues of concern regarding Routes F20, F30, F40 and F60 as identified on the SunZia May 2010 Arizona Land Use Resources Map. Specifically, Routes F20, F30 and F40 have significant, direct impacts on County lands purchased with public dollars to protect riparian corridors and provide wildlife linkages coinciding with these routes.

The following comments pertain to the routes proposed in the Cienega Valley:

- The Cienega Creek Natural Preserve along with National Park and Forest fall within the Pima County Conservation Lands System. The SDCP identified priority vulnerable species, cultural resources, special management areas and critical linkages in this area that may be impacted by the SunZia Southwest Transmission project.
- This area is adjacent or visible from Old Sonoita Highway, Marsh Station Road and Colossal Cave Road, all of which are designated Major Scenic Routes. In addition, Highway 83, a major tourist transportation area, would be impacted by these corridors.
- In addition, Saguaro National Park refers to wildlife habitat loss and fragmentation as one of the reasons they oppose SunZia routes adjacent to Saguaro National Park. Pima County is committed to the expansion of biological connections between Saguaro National Park East, the County's Cienega Creek Natural Preserve, the Coronado National Forest and other natural resource areas. A proposed 1,000-foot wide right of way for the SunZia Southwest Transmission project will compromise the intent of creating these natural wildlife linkages.
- Many historic resources are in the Cienega Creek and Rincon Creek areas, containing numerous important prehistoric sites and other historic resources marking milestones in the history of ranching in Pima County.

Mr. Adrian Garcia

Re: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project - Scoping Comments on Proposed Routes
and Expansion of Study Area

June 7, 2010

Page 7 of 8

- There are several Pima County Code issues to consider. Cienega Creek and its tributaries will be impacted by the proposed SunZia project. The Pima County Board of Supervisors adopted riparian habitat maps generated as part of the SDCP. These maps identify various classes of habitat as well as Important Riparian Areas, which are among the highest preservation priorities within the County for its linkage, habitat, water resource, flood control and recreational values. The Floodplain and Erosion Hazard Management Ordinance as amended and Conservation Lands Systems require these areas to be avoided when possible, and impacts must be minimized and mitigated. For impacts to riparian habitat on Pima County-owned lands, mitigation requirements can be more restrictive, i.e., mitigation for any impacts. The EIS should utilize the County riparian classification maps as the best available data and include a description of how County habitat protection requirements will be addressed in all route planning and construction design within Pima County.
- The Pima County Board of Supervisors established Conditions, Covenants and Restrictions (CC&Rs) that pertain to nearly all of the land located within the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve (floodplain, floodway and flood erosion zone). Under these CC&Rs, **"all parallel installations, including without limitation sewers, are prohibited"**. Along with the Priority Vulnerable Species listed under the SDCP, the Preserve also has known populations of federally listed threatened and endangered species that could be impacted by the project. These species include Gila topminnow, Gila chub and the Huachuca water umbel.
- In addition, the majority of the lands in the Preserve are set aside as mitigation for the County's Multi-species Conservation Plan, which requires the properties be maintained with no degradation to the natural ecosystems. It appears the majority of the alternative routes through Cienega Creek run parallel with the Preserve and would not be permitted. Any routes that run perpendicular to the Preserve would be permitted on a case-by-case basis, and require written approval by the Pima County Regional Flood Control District. Any impacts within the Preserve will require mitigation in accordance with the specific mitigation requirements dictated by the CC&Rs.
- Under the leadership of the Arizona Game and Fish Department, an interdisciplinary and key stakeholder group has begun the process of identifying critical wildlife movement corridors in Pinal County. Similar projects are in various stages of development in other counties, including Pima County. The proposed SunZia routes would impact a number of these.

Mr. Adrian Garcia

Re: SunZia Southwest Transmission Project - Scoping Comments on Proposed Routes
and Expansion of Study Area

June 7, 2010

Page 8 of 8

Summary

Most of the proposed alternative routes proposed by the SunZia project not only directly impact County-owned or managed lands that were acquired with voter-approved bond funds with the expressed intent to manage specifically to protect and preserve the natural and cultural resources for present and future benefits to the citizens of Pima County, but also unique and sensitive areas that will be significantly, adversely impacted with little if any benefit. Given that the transmission line routes proposed pass through our area to deliver energy products outside of the County and will provide only marginal benefits inside the County, and the issues raised by Saguaro National Park and the Bureau of Reclamation, Pima County is opposed to all transmission routes proposed through Pima County. Until all of our concerns are satisfactorily addressed, particularly the issue of a comprehensive regional assessment of actual need and where such resources should be appropriately located, the County remains opposed to the SunZia project.

Sincerely,



C.H. Huckelberry
County Administrator

CHH/mjk

Attachments

c: Nicole Fyffe, Executive Assistant to the County Administrator
Diana Durazo, Staff Assistant to the County Administrator

Appendix E Mitigation Requirements for Utilities Within and Adjacent to the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve

Prepared By: David Scalero, Pima County Regional Flood Control District, October, 2009

Over the last several years, a number of companies have requested and been granted permits to enter the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve (Preserve) to perform maintenance or reinstallation of their utility lines on existing easements. In addition, the Tucson Electric Power Company (TEP) property that crosses Cienega Creek in T16S-R6E-14 is subject to significant vegetation removal to protect overhead power lines, which can affect the integrity of the Preserve. All of these maintenance requests have involved the disturbance of soils and vegetation, thus requiring on-site mitigation. Most of the projects have not been successful (i.e., reseeding of the AT&T fiber optic line) due to the lack of proper planning and follow up by the appropriate parties. However, recent success has provided County personnel (both Amy Loughner and I) with some guidance to promote proper mitigation on and adjacent to District lands. The following is a step-by-step process that is recommended for future utility requests within the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve:

1. Consult the existing management plan to see if there are any restrictions or conditions placed on the lands to be disturbed,
2. Work directly with a qualified botanist, ecologist, biologist, or other professional in the field of environmental protection with knowledge of plant physiology. Most utility companies will hire a consulting agency to do this work, as opposed to having someone on staff. County staff should require that a qualified person (or company) be contracted if the utility company has not done so already,
3. Request a set of plans and a brief (concise) description of the project,
4. Schedule and attend a field meeting with all parties (including NRPR) to discuss the project and proposed restoration plans. County staff should identify any plant species that should be avoided or salvaged during ground disturbance and discuss the criteria that will be included in the Special Use Permit (provided below). Pictures should be taken of the area for reference,
5. Provide NRPR staff with a detailed list of comments to include in the Special Use Permit that will be provided to the utility company per the Cienega Creek Natural Preserve Management Plan. The list should include, but not be limited to, the following criteria:
 - Identify any restrictions and/or conditions identified in the management plan, if applicable
 - Keep all gates and fences closed during non-construction hours to prevent unauthorized vehicles from entering the Preserve; make sure area is secure post-construction
 - Limit the area of disturbance to that which is presented in the project plans and what was discussed during the field meeting
 - Identify and flag plants to be trimmed or salvaged
 - Notification of the County's native plant ordinance
 - Notification of any threatened and endangered species concerns

- Identification of the Floodplain Use Permit, if one is needed
 - Request for a list of the plants/seeds that will be used for revegetation efforts and specifications on any mulch or hydroseed mixture that will be utilized
 - Request a schedule of when construction/maintenance activities will be conducted
 - Request for a project completion report, including photographs of the revegetated area,
6. Obtain a copy of the Special Use Permit once it has been completed and transmitted to the utility company,
 7. Obtain the utility's project schedule, if not identified in the Special Use Permit,
 8. Review the list of plants/seeds that will be used for revegetation of the site in relation to the native plants in the surrounding area and notify the utility's contact person of any discrepancies,
 9. Review the project completion report to insure all revegetation work is satisfactory.
 10. Conduct a post-project site visit to verify the integrity of the revegetation efforts, documented with photographs.

It is highly important to include all of the conditions within the Special Use Permit, as this will be the document to which the utility is responsible. This guide could also be useful for disturbances to other District-owned properties, even if no management plan is available.