



Challenges in siting SunZia transmission line highlight need for regional planning

Proposed routes would impact wildlands and wildlife habitat

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Denver, CO (June 14, 2013)— A final plan for the SunZia Southwest transmission project was released today by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) identifying the agency's preferred routes in Arizona and New Mexico. The Wilderness Society and NRDC continue to have significant concerns about the impacts to natural resources along the BLM-preferred route in the San Pedro Valley in Southern Arizona and oppose line siting along the San Pedro River or in the Aravaipa Canyon area.

"We support responsible renewable energy and transmission development and understand that every project has tradeoffs, but the proposed SunZia route in Arizona does not offer an acceptable tradeoff," said Alex Daue, Renewable Energy Associate at The Wilderness Society. "Though we appreciate the BLM's broader west-wide efforts to guide development to low-conflict areas, SunZia should not be built in the San Pedro Valley."

"We know that we will need some new transmission to get wind and solar energy to market. The challenge is picking the right places with the lowest impacts, and the San Pedro Valley is not the right place," said Helen O'Shea, Director of NRDC's Western Renewable Energy Project. "The impacts to important wildlife habitat and corridors and migratory flyways along the San Pedro River would be significant. These are the kind of critical natural resources that we need to avoid when planning for and building renewable energy projects."

Concerns regarding development of SunZia in the San Pedro Valley include runoff and sediment flowing into the San Pedro River, impacts to the region's native and migratory birds and habitat fragmentation in a region that has had millions of dollars invested in conservation work to mitigate for other development. The US Fish and Wildlife Service is also gathering public input on a potential National Wildlife Refuge in the San Pedro Valley.

"Transmission development can have serious impacts on the land, but plays an important role in supporting wind and solar projects," said Daue. "Building only what we need and avoiding paths through sensitive wildlands and wildlife habitat should be a priority. Investing more in planning efforts such as the BLM's good work to re-evaluate the West-wide Energy Corridors will allow us to proactively identify corridors that can help deliver renewable energy with the least amount of impacts."

"The difficulty in finding appropriate routes for the SunZia project highlights the need for pro-active planning for renewable energy development at the regional level," says O'Shea. "Identifying zones and corridors that

are appropriate for development is essential to building only the infrastructure that we really need to deliver clean energy, and in the right places."

The Final Environmental Impact Statement for SunZia also includes an alternative southeastern Arizona route through the Aravaipa Canyon region. The Wilderness Society and NRDC also oppose this route, which would fragment the second largest roadless area in the two-state region. In New Mexico, issues which should be addressed for the SunZia routes include the crossing of the Rio Grande River, which would impact migrating birds, and the intersection of several wilderness-quality areas.

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The Wilderness Society is the leading public lands conservation organization working to protect wilderness and inspire Americans to care for our wild places. Founded in 1935, and now with more than 500,000 members and supporters, TWS has led the effort to permanently protect 110 million acres of wilderness and to ensure sound management of our shared national lands.

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The Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC) is an international nonprofit environmental organization with more than 1.4 million members and online activists. Since 1970, our lawyers, scientists, and other environmental specialists have worked to protect the world's natural resources, public health, and the environment. NRDC has offices in New York City, Washington, D.C., Los Angeles, San Francisco, Chicago, Livingston, Montana, and Beijing. Visit us at www.nrdc.org and follow us on Twitter [@NRDC](https://twitter.com/NRDC).