

My name is Paul Green. I am Executive Director of Tucson Audubon, a community conservation organization, founded in 1949, based in Tucson with around 4000 member households throughout southeastern Arizona. We provide opportunities for people to go birding, to learn about birds, ecology, and conservation, and give people ways to conserve their natural world.

In 2001, as partner of BirdLife International, Tucson Audubon established the Arizona Important Bird Areas program that identifies the most important areas for birds in the United States. The IBA program is global in scope, with 11,000 IBAs in 200 countries. Currently there are 2400 IBAs in the US, 383 of global importance. 37 IBAs in Arizona with two of global importance.

Tucson Audubon is here this evening to talk about why the SunZia transmission line should not be located along the San Pedro River valley because of the importance of the valley in the context of the arid southwest. It is one of the last undammed and perennial rivers in our region, and suffers threats from many sources. We want to make the point to the planners and the engineers that the San Pedro River is a habitat of global significance, and should not be degraded by the planned activities.

Three main issues: diversity, migratory corridor, habitat fragmentation.

The San Pedro River Valley supports nearly two-thirds of the avian diversity in the U.S. About 100 species breed around the river and an additional 250 species use the corridor for migration and winter range. The river valley provides habitat for more than 80 species of mammals, 65 species of reptiles and amphibians and 200 species of butterflies.

The valley is a key migratory and breeding corridor for millions of birds, especially riparian dependent species. These include some sensitive species, such as the Willow Flycatcher, Yellow-billed Cuckoo, Gray Hawk, and other raptors including the Black-Hawk and Zone-tailed Hawk.

There is a great deal of published work that detail how transmission lines cause significant and direct mortality of raptors, and we can supply you with that if you need it.

We need to keep habitat and landscape unfragmented in the San Pedro River valley for many other regional wildlife populations.

There is a strong likelihood that the access and maintenance roads will become ATV/ORV travel corridors resulting in significant disturbances of wildlife and habitat fragmentation.

The practice of clearing the transmission corridors of all vegetation for fire suppression and transmission line maintenance will result in even more fragmentation and impacting the wildlife corridor connection between the major mountain ranges, of the Rincons/Catalinas with the Galiuros and other ranges further east .

You should also know that the reach of the San Pedro River from just north of Benson, Arizona (i.e., “the Narrows” north to the San Pedro-Gila River confluence at Winkelman, Arizona, has been identified as both a State and Global “

The Lower San Pedro River Important Bird Area, was recognized for the very dense populations of certain species of conservation concern or status it supports, including the federally Endangered Southwestern Willow Flycatcher (the densest population in Arizona), and also the highly ranked species populations of Bell’s Vireo, Lucy’s Warbler, Yellow-billed Cuckoo (proposed Candidate for federal Endangered/Threatened status), and Gray Hawk.

While Important Bird Areas status carries no regulatory authority, it does bring biological information and habitat protection importance awareness to the public’s attention, as well bringing quantitative data and habitat information to the agencies as assist in agency’s land use and land management planning in order to conserve high value wildlife resources at the state and even global levels.

A new power line corridor and multiple high tower structure infrastructure within the San Pedro Valley would severely compromise this recognized Important Bird Area in Arizona.

Tucson Audubon feels strongly urge that this special wildlife area should not be compromised by this transmission line route which would degrade its habitats for

wildlife, and endanger the many high conservation value bird populations it supports.

By disturbing the habitat, and by fragmenting the habitat, biodiversity will decrease, birds will die and also be killed.

In conclusion, Tucson Audubon recommends:

The transmission line should follow existing highway and/or transmission line corridor/routes, whichever is the least environmentally sensitive and has the least impact.

There should be no placement of towers along the San Pedro Valley

There should be no placement of towers in the Aravaipa Canyon wilderness ecosystem, also another key riparian and raptor nesting area,

And finally, no placement across high quality riparian lands, in particular at San Manuel, Arizona, the Mammoth, Arizona old-growth mesquite bosque, the San Pedro River-Aravaipa confluence, or near Dudleyville, Arizona.