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Transmission Line Through Lower San Pedro River Valley Approved SunZia to Inflict Great Losses on Arizona’s Natural and Cultural Resources

Tucson, Arizona – On January 24, 2015 Secretary of Interior Sally Jewell signed the formal federal approval for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, a high-voltage transmission line that will cut north along the San Pedro River, destroying previously untouched wildlife habitat and disrupting primary wildlife migration corridors between the Galiuro and Santa Catalina/Rincon Mountains. The final route selected by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) would irreparably harm some of Arizona’s most important natural and cultural resources and irreversibly damage a unique and important ecosystem.

SunZia is proposing to build two 500-kilovolt transmission lines between central New Mexico and Arizona purportedly to deliver predominantly wind-generated electricity to Arizona and California. This project would create one of the largest new utility corridors in the western U.S. and cause significant harm in some of the most important wildlife areas in Arizona. The damage that this project would do to Arizona’s lower San Pedro Valley region cannot be justified given the questionable and unproved claims that this project is needed to promote renewable energy resources.

“The harm this project will cause to our river valley is entirely unnecessary given that the project is not needed to meet any renewable energy needs in Arizona or California and would squander both financial and environmental resources if built,” says Mick Meader, Co-Chair of the Cascabel Working Group, formed by Middle San Pedro Valley landowners concerned about the project. “California and Arizona have both demonstrated that they can easily meet present and future renewable energy needs with their own resources. Building this project will not increase the use of renewable energy, merely rearrange which resources are developed, if even that.”

This routing would impact 40 years of conservation efforts by federal and state government agencies, corporations and conservation organizations, which have spent more than \$40 million to protect more than 200,000 acres of valley lands. The San Pedro River is the last undammed

river in the Desert Southwest and the principal migration corridor for birds, plus it hosts the greatest mammal diversity in North America. The alternative SunZia route that the BLM considered – the one preferred by SunZia proponents – threads its way between the Aravaipa Canyon, Galiuro Mountains and Santa Teresa Wilderness Areas and would fragment the largest block of intact habitat in Arizona outside the Grand Canyon region.

“Siting this proposed transmission project in some of Arizona’s most sensitive and unfragmented lands is unacceptable,” said Sandy Bahr, chapter director for Sierra Club’s Grand Canyon (Arizona) chapter. “Due to the known significant negative impacts this project would have on the San Pedro Valley and the important habitat it provides, the impacts on cultural resources, and the fact that the project is just as likely to carry fossil-fueled electricity as renewables, Sierra Club strongly opposes the SunZia Transmission Line.”

In addition, the BLM’s use of an idealized and untenable energy development scenario to assess cumulative environmental impacts negates much of the analysis for the project. The BLM essentially dismissed public comment on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement, Resource Management Plan Amendments, and Environmental Assessment. Such dismissals are inconsistent with the National Environmental Policy Act’s requirements for a full analysis of reasonable alternatives; an assessment of the direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts; and the intent of the law to create the clearest possible picture of the project.

“We strongly object to sacrificing high-quality environmental values to such an inadequate and corrupted process and will work to correct this however we can,” said Peter Else, chair of the Friends of the Aravaipa Region, a group of lower San Pedro landowners and conservationists. “We cannot permit such an overt disregard for the intent of the law.”

The Cascabel Working Group works to educate citizens about the Middle San Pedro River Valley, advocating for the protection of the valley’s environment, culture, and traditional land uses. Additional information about the Cascabel Working Group is available at <http://www.cascabelworkinggroup.org>.

[Sierra Club](#) is a conservation organization with 2.3 million members and supporters nationwide and chapters in every state, including the [Grand Canyon Chapter](#) in Arizona. Sierra Club’s mission is to explore, enjoy, and protect the wild places of the earth.

Friends of the Aravaipa Region is a network of conservation activists and local landowners dedicated to the protection of wildlife habitat in the lower San Pedro River watershed of southern Arizona.