

SunZia Transmission Project Update

The Lower San Pedro River valley, an Important Bird Area of Global Significance, is without parallel in the American Southwest. Within the span of a few miles, the Chihuahuan Desert scrub reaches its westernmost limit and folds into the saguaro-dotted hills of the Sonoran Desert. The valley's high biodiversity, including more than 400 bird species, comes from the Rocky Mountains to the north and the Sierra Madre Mountains to the south.

The proposed SunZia Southwest Transmission Project, designed to carry power over two 500-kilovolt (kV) lines from central New Mexico to Phoenix and southern California, now threatens this unique area. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is evaluating alternative routes, some of which pass through the Lower San Pedro valley. If constructed, up to 300 sixteen-story towers would run the length of the valley, with an access easement up to 1000 feet wide and access roads to every tower. Vegetation beneath the lines would be cleared. In addition to the initial access corridor, SunZia's planners have requested that a one-mile wide corridor be approved by the BLM for future expansion. It is difficult to conceive of a mile-wide utility corridor along the narrow San Pedro Valley.

The comment period for the SunZia Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) ended on August 22, 2012, and the next step will be for the BLM to issue a revised or final environmental impact statement for public review. The BLM's preferred alternative follows the west side of the San Pedro Valley for approximately 45 miles, opening an entirely new corridor for much of this distance. This has raised strong objections from southern Arizona's environmental community, Pima County, residents of the San Pedro Valley, and others.

A host of local and state environmental organizations and community members provided extensive comments on the DEIS, including the Tucson Audubon Society. A partial posting of submitted comments is available at <http://nmeader.com/sunzia/route/deis.html>. The BLM, or rather, its contractor Environmental Planning Group (EPG), must now categorize and respond to all of these, incorporating them into the EIS or providing explanations for dismissing them. Many groups called for the "No Action" alternative, asking that this project not be built, and some provided clear alternatives for addressing energy transmission needs in the region.

The BLM's timeline for the project calls for releasing the final environmental impact statement for comment toward the end of 2012. The public will have a thirty-day period to challenge the EIS at this time. This protest period will be an extremely important opportunity for conservationists to make it clear that they will actively oppose an arbitrary decision. This may be especially necessary given the BLM's past reluctance to effectively address challenges to the alleged purpose of the project and to seriously consider alternatives to approving a new industrial-scale infrastructure project within the San Pedro conservation corridor. The proposed Southline Transmission Project is a sound example of such an alternative.

Following this protest period, the BLM will then issue a Record of Decision for the project, declaring a final route, and then SunZia must apply for a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility with the Arizona Corporation Commission (ACC), hence the importance of taking note of elections to the ACC this November. Public interest groups will then have the opportunity to challenge the project in hearings held by the ACC's Power Plant and Line Siting

Committee. It is unlikely, however, that the public can substantially influence the ACC's decision on the project. SunZia must obtain a host of lesser permits as well.

SunZia itself strongly objects to the San Pedro Valley route, in part because of its added length and greater legal complications, and is vigorously advocating for a route that would cross both the Galiuro Mountains and the San Pedro River Valley south of the Aravaipa Canyon Wilderness. SunZia is working to obtain resolutions from the various county boards of supervisors to sway the Arizona Corporation Commission to override the BLM's choice, which the Commission has the legal authority to do.

If SunZia obtains all necessary permits for the proposed transmission corridor, SunZia can sell all or portions of the approved route. Coincidentally, SunZia's majority owner has a long-standing interest in providing transmission capacity for its large planned and permitted natural gas-powered plant in Bowie, Arizona.

Norm "Mick" Meader and Peter Else.



JIM HAYS



Obituary: Wanda Britten

Remembering Wanda Britten Shattuck, who died September 5, I think of her smile and great sense of humor which enabled her to fight a long fight against powerful interests who wanted a cross town freeway. The Rillito-Pantano Parkway would run along the north bank of the Rillito, to the Pantano to I-10 southeast of Tucson. Wanda and others put together a grassroots coalition, raised funds for a big campaign and referred the funding authorization to the voters, who voted it down. She wanted Tucson to be different from Phoenix which was building one freeway after another. Tucson was growing fast in the 1970s and 1980s, and streets were widened without any

consideration for the neighborhoods affected. The Rillito-Pantano Coalition included many neighborhood groups. **RESULT: residents now have a vote** and meetings to discuss mitigation before the bulldozers arrive to widen their streets. Also, there is a linear park along much of the Rillito, used by many bikers, walkers, and joggers.

The Rillito-Pantano Coalition became "Buffers" in the 1980s and worked to elect environmentally sensitive Supervisors Iris Dewhirst, Sharon Bronson, and Gregg Lunn and got the Buffer Overlay Zone Ordinance (BOZO) adopted by the Board of Supervisors. The BOZO required setbacks and low density zoning near the boundaries of Saguaro National Park, Tucson

Mountain Park, the Coronado National Forest and any future open space parks. The developers cried "foul" but the ordinance became part of the eventual open space plan. Many, many people helped Wanda in these efforts, but her political sense and keen desire to maintain the Sonoran Desert beauty of Tucson led us to where we are today. We crafted a huge land swap involving Federal, State, and County agencies to trade land for Rancho Vistoso so that development would be on the west side of Oracle Road. Catalina State Park came into being. "Buffers" also successfully fought against a shopping center development at Oracle and Tangerine Roads. We had to go to court to get that zoning referendum on the ballot, and the voters won again... no development. Recently, another

developer with a new plan, Desert Springs, is attempting to put high density development next to Catalina State Park on that same land.

Wanda leaves her husband Lemuel, daughter Pamela Thyret, and a grandson Lemuel Thyret. We remember her efforts to shape this community without additional freeways and apartment buildings on the Parks' boundaries, and with many environmentally significant areas now part of the Sonoran Desert Protection Plan. Most recently, Wanda served on Pima County's Conservation Acquisition Commission. Wanda was a Tucson High and Wellesley College graduate, and a long time community volunteer before her politically active years. She will be missed.

Julia Perry Gordon