

impact the proposed pumping may have on such a right. Until the federal reserved rights to claims associated with SPRNCA have been finally adjudicated, it would be impossible to determine whether the proposed pumping would need to be curtailed to preserve SPRNCA, and if so, to what extent.”

Silver, Gerrodette, another resident Dutch Nagle, and the BLM have filed appeals to this decision.

Tony Davis in the *Arizona Daily Star* cites Robert Glennon, as saying that “for BLM to win, it must show with credible computer modeling that Tribute’s pumping will reduce the river’s flow enough to compromise federal water rights. I don’t know that it needs to be a particular subdivision that makes the case but at some point in time (one development) is going to be the straw that breaks the camel’s back. You can’t continue to have huge developments going in when the river is fragile to begin with.”

Coda: *Arizona Republic*, June 10, 2013: “It shouldn’t take more than common sense for the Department of Water Resources to see the impact of groundwater pumping and the importance of ensuring riparian areas continue to maintain their valuable ecosystems.”

*Paul Green, Executive Director,
Tucson Audubon*

Sources

Tony Davis. The BLM fights for the Southwest’s last free-flowing river. *High Country News*, February 18, 2013.

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Economic Contributions of Wildlife Viewing to the Arizona Economy: A County-Level Analysis, a grant funded project by Southwick Associates based on US FWS data and funded by a grant to Tucson Audubon by the Arizona Game & Fish Department.

Adam Curtis www.svherald.com/finding_balance

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Arizona Republic. A river runs through it (but it may not always), June 10, 2013. www.azcentral.com/opinions/articles/20130607editorial-state-puts-river-risk.html

SunZia Environmental Impact Statement Avoids Issues, Harms Arizona’s Heritage

On June 14, 2013, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project (available at <http://www.blm.gov/nm/sunzia>). This was a great blow for those of us who treasure the San Pedro Valley and its biological richness. This FEIS includes the BLM’s preferred alternative route, which would construct two 500-kilovolt lines down the west side of the valley for 47 miles, crossing three ranches that have been purchased as part of Pima County’s Sonoran Desert Conservation Plan, and spanning the sensitive lower Buehman Canyon.

The San Pedro valley is the principal migration corridor for birds in the arid Southwest and hosts the greatest mammal diversity in North America. The alternative transmission route—crossing the Galiuro Mountains between the Aravaipa and Galiuro Mountains Wildernesses—is equally sensitive and no more of a solution.

The public has a minimum of 30 days to comment on the FEIS, although the BLM does not legally have to consider or incorporate responses. The Record of Decision is scheduled to be signed on or before September 10. At that time concerned parties will have 30 days to appeal the decision. It is unlikely that the federal government will yield to any challenges, however. Arizona environmental groups are working together on a response.

Once the BLM has finalized its decision, SunZia must move on to the Arizona Corporation Commission and the New Mexico Public Regulation Commission for additional approvals. SunZia must also acquire a host of other federal, state and local permits.

The BLM received around 900 comment letters on the Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) critical of the project,

demonstrating the immense concern that it has generated. In responding to these letters, however, the BLM summarily dismissed some of the most substantive and critical comments that reviewers made to strengthen and correct the DEIS. The scale of this dismissal is stunning. This oversight would seem to leave the EIS open to legal challenge.

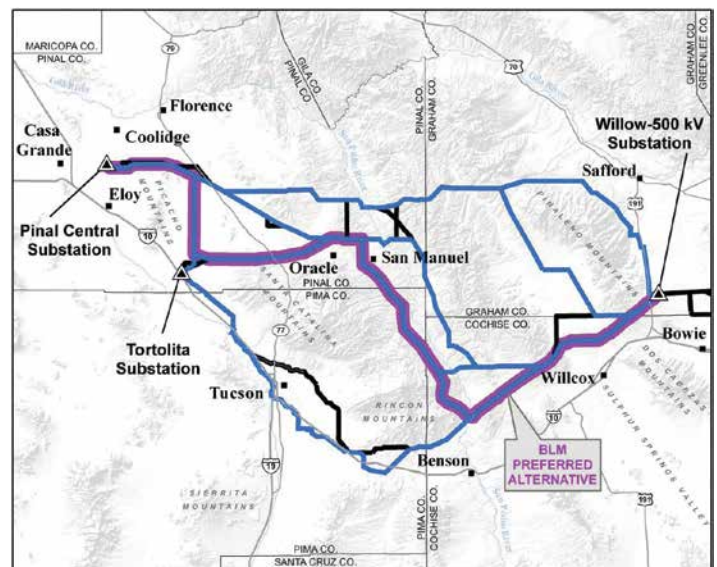
To evaluate SunZia the BLM employed a highly idealized renewable energy scenario that does not consider future overall power needs in the Southwest nor the project proponent’s underlying intentions. In so doing, the BLM is sacrificing an irreplaceable Arizona environmental gem that governmental agencies—including the BLM itself—corporations, public interest groups, and individuals have worked for more than three decades to protect.

The project is also incompletely conceived, having originally been proposed by the SouthWestern Power Group to serve its permitted but not-yet-constructed Bowie, Arizona 1,000-megawatt natural gas-fired

power plant. Because of this, the project stops in east-central Arizona, but its expanded, official purpose now is to transfer power generated in New Mexico to California. To complete the transfer, SunZia would rob Arizona utilities and ratepayers of \$400 million of new transmission lines built for our own use. This would consume transmission capacity vital to Arizona’s solar development in central and western Arizona while subsidizing out-of-state interests for their own gain at a huge cost to Arizona’s environment.

We can find better ways to meet future energy needs and renewable energy ideals than by making these kinds of extraordinary sacrifices and blunders. The federal government has an obligation to evaluate the project based on how utilities will actually use it, not on the proponent’s sales pitch or the wishful thinking of Obama administration policymakers. Without this, the process lacks integrity and thwarts informed public engagement.

*Norm “Mick” Meader, Co-Chair,
Cascabel Working Group*



Top: View of Galiuro Mountains and San Pedro River valley. Above: Map from the BLM’s Environmental Impact Statement showing the proposed San Pedro route for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project.