



THE SECRETARY OF THE INTERIOR
WASHINGTON

APR 04 2011

The Honorable Raúl M. Grijalva
House of Representatives
Washington, DC 20515

Dear Representative Grijalva:

Thank you for your February 14, 2011, letter regarding the proposed SunZia Southwest Transmission Line Project. I agree that a collaborative approach is necessary as the Nation pursues renewable energy development on public lands.

As you noted, transmission line planning and permitting is a complex process involving many stakeholders, particularly for expansive projects like SunZia. As the designated lead Federal Agency, the Bureau of Land Management is responsible for compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and other Federal laws, regulations, and policies in analyzing the SunZia project and preparing the Environmental Impact Statement and associated documents.

During the scoping period, the BLM held public meetings and solicited input through mailings, newsletters, and the project website. Agency representatives did participate in meetings with local communities along the San Pedro River hosted by the Winkelman and Redington Natural Resource Conservation Districts, as well as a meeting hosted by the Cascabel Working Group. These efforts have resulted in coordination and continued dialogue at the local levels as evaluation of the SunZia project proceeds.

In addition, formal cooperating Agencies for this project include the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, the Arizona State Land Department, the Arizona Game and Fish Department, the New Mexico State Land Office, and three military installations with the U.S. Department of Defense. Their representatives continue to provide valuable input that supplements the extensive comments received to date.

Once the draft EIS is published, the BLM will hold additional public meetings and there will be a public comment period. The BLM will consider all of these public comments as it works to prepare a final EIS.

The Arizona State Land Department has jurisdiction over the majority of the route alternatives under consideration within the state for the proposed transmission line. The Arizona Corporation Commission will be required to issue a Certificate of Environmental Compatibility as part of its permitting process. The State environmental review and permitting process and the ACC's role in the overall outcome of the proposed SunZia project is yet another opportunity for stakeholder collaboration and input.

While the NEPA process continues to analyze the environmental effects of the SunZia project, the BLM will continue to collaborate with cooperating agencies, the public, and interested stakeholders to ensure thorough consideration of comments and concerns. I appreciate your continued interest in the SunZia project and support for renewable energy development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Ken Salazar". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "K" and "S".

Ken Salazar

RAÚL M. GRIJALVA
7TH DISTRICT OF ARIZONA

COMMITTEE ON NATURAL RESOURCES
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public
Lands, Chair
Subcommittee on Water and Power

COMMITTEE ON EDUCATION AND LABOR
Subcommittee on Workforce Protections
Subcommittee Early Childhood, Elementary and
Secondary Education

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January 5, 2010

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Mr. Ken Salazar
Secretary of the Interior
U.S. Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Salazar:

I write to you today to express my concern regarding the proposed routes for the SunZia Southwest Transmission Project in Southern Arizona. The proposed action would bring two parallel 500 kilovolt high capacity electric transmission lines through the Lower San Pedro River Valley, from New Mexico to Arizona, by extending a high-tension power line with a 1000 ft. wide access corridor. It is my understanding that the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) supports the project.

The Lower San Pedro River Watershed remains ecologically intact, with a relatively pristine landscape in a rapidly growing region. The proposed transmission lines would damage the delicate San Pedro Valley from the inevitable development that would follow the corridor. Additional roads and infrastructure will fragment core habitat areas for several threatened and endangered species in the San Pedro River, its watershed and its major tributaries, including Hot Springs Canyon. Several properties in the watershed are used by state and federal agencies for mitigation projects for several bird and fish species. Water quality could deteriorate due to erosion of upland soils caused by new or expanded access roads for the SunZia project.

Public land managers and ranchers throughout the western states have had problems dealing with environmental and infrastructure damage done by ATV users. SunZia service roads would facilitate ATV access and off-road abuses that lead to additional soil erosion, plant destruction and damage to wildlife habitat.

The BLM holds a conservation easement on several properties in the area to protect its ecological and cultural values. However, running a 1000 ft. utility corridor through the area is inconsistent with the BLM's own stated conservation goals in the San Pedro Watershed. There are no sufficient mitigation options for the damage new roads and infrastructure development could do to this fragile area.

I encourage the Department of Interior and the BLM to look into rerouting the proposed transmission lines to the south of the San Pedro River Valley, along existing transmission routes, including along the I-10 highway. While I recognize that the growth in the Tucson and Phoenix areas has put a strain on our utility system, we must remain mindful of the impacts of the solutions that are offered – and pushing this onto our pristine, natural areas is not the solution.

If you would like to speak with me about the concerns I have raised, please do not hesitate to call.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, reading "Raúl M. Grijalva". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a large, sweeping flourish at the end.

Raúl M. Grijalva
Chairman
Subcommittee on National Parks, Forests and Public Lands

cc: Bob Abbey, Director, Bureau of Land Management